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Fighting Fred of Frisco.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.



THE BOYS HELD THEIR TORCHES IN ONE HAND AND THEIR REVOLVERS IN THE OTHER.

Fighting Fred of Frisco;

OR,

The Castaways of Grizzly Camp.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BOY EXILES," "SNOW-SHOE TOM,"
"LOST BOY WHALERS," "KIT
CARSON CLUB," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LEFT TO THEIR FATE.

"It cannot be that they have gone away to stay, and have left us to our fate in this wild region."

"I'm afraid of it, Max."

"Then may not one of them ever see the settlements again! May Indian and grizzly make short work of the merciless villains! Here we are, ruthlessly abandoned in the wilds. I don't know where we are, for the map has been taken from us, and we are left to perish miserably in Grizzly Camp."

"We'll see about that! I remember, for one, that we are Yankee boys, and I'm going to see if Yankee pluck will not bring us out of this snap all O. K. I never did go much on that yellow guide, and precious little more on Tucson Tom. As for Captain Snake, I did have a better opinion of him, but after all I guess he's no better than the other two. Hold up your heads, boys, and look misfortune squarely in the face. I'm not going to let this infamous desertion dampen my spirits or prevent me from having a good time. Since we have been abandoned to the mercy of grizzlies and Indians, let us inspect our armament and make the best of a bad bargain. In the first place, boys, let us throw defiance into the teeth of fate. Off with your hats, and give three cheers for Camp Grizzly!"

The three boys, who stood before the lone cabin among the Cascade mountains, took off their hats, and, headed by the one who had spoken last, gave three rousing cheers.

"Let us see now what the rascals have really left behind," resumed the most defiant of the three youths, a well-limbed boy named Fred Nichols. "The only wonder is that they've left us anything at all, and under the circumstances we will feel grateful for the smallest favor."

A light laugh followed these words, and the three boys disappeared beyond the rough threshold of the cabin.

While they are inspecting the meager arsenal left them, and inwardly growling at their ill-luck, let us for a moment look at the circumstances which had brought them to the spot where we have introduced them to the reader.

Fred Nichols, Max Martin and Ned Knight were chums whose ages did not vary more than three months from seventeen years.

Nine weeks prior to the date of the opening of the present chapter, which, let us inform the reader right here, is October 12th, 1882, the boys left San Francisco full of glee for a trip to Fort Okinakane, on the north branch of the Columbia, within the limits of Washington Ter-

ritory, where they expected to enter the service of a well-known fur company.

The entire party consisted of six persons—the three boys already mentioned, and three men—Tucson Tom, a well-known guide; Old Blue Mountain, Indian-fighter and trapper; and Captain Snake, a half-breed, a man who had been trusted more than he deserved.

The three men had been paid well for the work for which they were hired, and nobody beyond them had dreamed of treachery.

We might remark here that the boys had on several occasions caught the trio holding whispered conversations, and while Fred, ever watchful and shrewd, feared that a game of some kind was afoot, he did not think that they were to be ruthlessly abandoned and left to shift for themselves, hundreds of miles from their destination.

After a lengthy but not unadventurous journey almost across Oregon, the little party of six found themselves in front of a strong and uninhabited cabin among the Cascades, a short distance south of the main stream of the Columbia.

The cabin, standing lone and weather-beaten, and without a door, told them that some persons had been before them; but it had been abandoned many years prior to the young trappers' arrival.

It stood in the most beautiful yet wildest part of the Cascade range, above the *dalles* of the great River of the West.

Lofty mountains lifted their heads on every side, some timbered almost to their points, others rugged and bare, as though a fire had stripped them of their trees.

Hundreds of these mountain trees were pines that seemed to touch the skies; their circumference and height surprised even the boys, and this when they had seen the renowned sequoia groves of California.

The cabin of course proved a friend to the mountain travelers.

They stripped the packs from their horses, and depositing them in the hut, turned the animals loose to seek their meal, while they—men and boys—either rested themselves or scoured the new region for game.

Several days were passed at the cabin by the entire party.

The mountain forests swarmed with game of every description, and the rivers that poured their waters into the Columbia were well stocked with fish.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the three boys, full of sport, left camp for a fish, and did not return until the sun had set behind a mountain which they had appropriately named Bald Cone.

Then it was that they made a discovery well calculated to fill their souls with horror.

The camp was uninhabited, and worse still, not a horse was to be found!

During their absence Tucson Tom and his companions had taken the animals and decamped, leaving them to go on or stay there, according to their choice.

Abandoned in the wilds of Northern Oregon was not a pleasant thought, and it was natural that Max should see no pleasure in the future.

What added to the peril of their situation was

the fact that they had crossed a large Indian trail the day before reaching the cabin.

This had probably made the three guides and hunters turn back; but why should they abandon the lads to almost certain death?

It looked like treachery of the blackest hue.

Now let us return to the three castaways whom we left inspecting the cabin for the purpose of seeing what the rascally trio had left behind.

The search was brief, but yielded more than the boys expected.

They found that the deserters had left them a gun apiece and a fair supply of ammunition, a few rough cooking utensils and three traps large enough to hold animals smaller than the wolf; also an ax and a hatchet.

Beyond these things nothing of utility had been left behind, but the faces of the boys brightened when they beheld the little heap.

"We're a long ways from poverty," exclaimed Fred. "I fancy that these things were left at Captain Snake's suggestion."

"You still take some stock in the half-breed?" Ned half-queried.

"A little," smiled Fred. "He's not altogether bad—that yellow-skinned old fellow isn't. The infamous scheme that has been carried out found existence in Old Blue Mountain's brain, and Tucson Tom wasn't slow to follow the suggestion. Where they've gone I don't care. They have left us here, but let us show them what Yankee pluck can accomplish. I'm for fighting adversity to the bitter end."

"So am I," echoed Ned. "The odds are against us at present, for I am lost as much here as I would be if dropped blindfolded in the heart of Africa."

"Courage! courage!" enjoined Fred. "Now let us taste the fish we've caught, and after that be in life in earnest."

The boys left the cabin and Max hastened to the spot where he had deposited the results of their fishing excursion a few minutes before, but the exclamation of astonishment followed:

"Somebody has stolen the fish."

"Impossible!" said Fred and Ned bounding forward.

"Here's where I laid them," answered Max, pointing to the spot where the fish had lain, for there were scales on the ground, nothing more—not a single salmon.

"This beats everything," declared Fred. "One misfortune swiftly follows another. The fish were here five minutes ago," and his eyes flashed angrily.

"I'd like to see the miserable thief!" he ejaculated. "If he's an Indian he dare not show himself; if a sneaking white man, he had better keep his distance. We have been left here by three of the meanest men that ever struck a trail; but that is no reason why we should be deprived of our supper. My opinion is, boys, that the thief has gone in this direction. Here are some scales that confirm my belief. By Jove! if we come up with the salmon thief, there'll be some fun."

Led by Fred, whose courage enthused them all, Ned and Max cocked their guns as they ran.

Fifty yards away the boy castaways halted suddenly, for some animal was rushing through the dense undergrowth directly toward them.

"Stand your ground!" commanded Fred, raising his piece.

The next moment there burst into view a tremendous grizzly, beneath whose enormous paws the very earth seemed to shake.

He came forward with baleful eyes, and snout erect, and in his mouth he carried a magnificent string of mountain fish.

CHAPTER II.

BEAR STEAKS FOR SUPPER—INDIANS.

THE fierce aspect of this animated picture was softened somewhat by the fish that dangled from the grizzly's mouth.

"Look out!" called Fred to his companions as he stood his ground and threw his weapon against his shoulder.

He took a hasty aim and fired straight at the head of the monster.

As the sun had set and the mountains were full of shadows, it required good marksmanship to drive a bullet into the brain of a bounding bear.

The grizzly seemed to take no account of Fred's shot, for he neither stopped nor dropped the fish, but plunged on with his little eyes snapping furiously.

Chagrined at his ill-luck, Fred lowered the rifle, an excellent repeating firearm, and holding it in his hand, essayed another shot with a different result, for the grizzly, hard hit, uttered a mad growl, but continued to cling tenaciously to the salmon.

"Pour it into him!" shouted Fred. "Cheat the old stager out of his supper, and gain one for ourselves."

Ned and Max sprung forward; but before they could bring their rifles to bear on the brute, he altered his course, and charged directly at them.

The boys fell back without firing their pieces, for the grizzly was almost upon them, and they had barely time to spring aside ere he dashed by at full speed and within arm's length of their bodies.

"Come along!" shouted Fred Nichols springing after the bear which appeared to be badly wounded. "He's got to give us the fish or bear-steaks—I don't care which."

The grizzly dashed straight toward the cabin, and turning one of its corners disappeared.

The boys were not far behind him, and when they reached the hut not a glimpse of the grizzly could they obtain.

Was it possible that the old fellow had taken possession of the cabin?

If he had not, what had become of him?

The ground in front of the hut was comparatively open, and the bear, if he had not sought the cabin, could have been seen.

The boys paused in front of the old structure, and gazed into each other's faces.

A grizzly in their home was an adventure they had not bargained for.

After a while Fred crept forward, and reconnoitered.

He heard a singular sound beyond the threshold, and rejoining his companions, told them that their salmon supper for the present was a

thing of the past; the bear was at last enjoying the stolen meal!

The lads retired a short distance from the cabin, and held what Fred called "a council of war."

When the grizzly had finished his meal, might he not take a notion to wreak his vengeance on the few perishable and very valuable things the old hut contained?

Tucson Tom and his companions had left several little sacks of sugar, salt and coffee behind, and these to the castaways were worth their weight in gold.

Well did the boys know that it would be foolhardiness to attack the bear in his retreat, and then there was no telling how long he might see fit to hold the fort.

If they had possessed a dog, they might have induced the old fellow to show himself and present a target for their rifles; but the only dog the party owned had been coaxed away by the deserters.

An hour passed away, but Old Ephraim did not show his head.

A full round moon showed herself in the cloudless skies and silvered the ground to the very threshold of Bruin's den.

Eager for a glimpse of their enemy, and hungry as wolves, the three boys watched the door with cocked rifles and fingers ready at the trigger.

"I'm not going to stand this a moment longer!" cried Fred at the end of the second hour. "I don't propose to sit here without my supper, and await the pleasure of that mean grizzly. He's got to show himself, or let us know why not."

"My opinion is that you'll get into trouble if you precipitate events," ventured Max, the most cautious member of the trio.

"Trouble be hanged!" was the response. "Think of the luscious supper we've been deprived of." And closing his lips firmly behind the last sentence, Fred went forward determined, as his manner indicated, to bring matters to a crisis.

Ned and Max saw him approach the cabin and halt several feet from its door, or rather threshold, for door, as we have said, the old shanty had not.

The sound which the boy had heard before was now still, as if the bear, having finished the fish, had retired for the night.

Fred dropped on all fours and crept nearer.

"I'm going to see about this," he said to himself. "If Old Eph is taking a nap he's likely to be disturbed."

A short crawl brought the fearless boy to the opening, and to his companions' surprise he stopped there and tried to pierce the gloom that lay beyond.

"Hello there! you old sneak-thief!" suddenly rung out Fred's clear tones. "You've got no business on the claim you've occupied. Come out and play the man!"

The words seemed to echo everywhere in the old shanty, but they did not elicit a single response—not even a grunt.

"He may be dead!" Fred sent over his shoulder to Ned and Max, and turned his attention to the hut again.

The next moment he recoiled with a half-stifled cry, for something cold had touched his face!

It was the muzzle of the occupant of the cabin!

Fred almost lost his balance as he went back, for the touch so icy was so unexpected and sent a terrible thrill through every fiber of his frame.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned. "Is the grizzly dead?"

"Dead? heavens no!" exclaimed Fred. "He's just been trying to kiss me."

Fred stood erect once more, and his eyes were riveted on the opening as if he expected to see the bear dash forward to an encounter; but the grizzly did not accommodate him.

The snout that had touched his cheek and almost frozen it had apparently been withdrawn, as though its owner was satisfied with his advance.

At last, however, and with a suddenness that startled the three supperless castaways, the homely head of the bear appeared in the dark opening.

"There he is!" said Fred in whispers as he raised his rifle already cocked. "Now, boys, let us give him the compliments of a broadside!"

Three guns instantly struck as many shoulders, and as the boys glanced down the barrels, the head disappeared as suddenly as it had been thrust into prominence.

"That's a scurvy trick!" growled Ned, sorely disappointed.

"A mean one, even for a bear," answered Fred. "Now look out, I'm going to rouse him if I can. The music of a bullet may bring him out."

Fred's last word was followed by the ringing report of his rifle.

"Here he is!" ejaculated Ned and Max in one breath, as a tremendous figure cleared the threshold in a lumbering manner, and was fired at by the two boys, the reports of whose weapons were blended into one.

This time fortune seemed to direct the bullets, for at the crack of the rifles the bear fell heavily on his side, and moved but once as the echoes died away.

"Bear-steaks are better than fish-bones, any day!" shouted Fred as he went forward, forgetting that the huge monster might not be dead.

"It isn't so terrible to be abandoned, after all," was Ned's conclusion.

"My opinion is that the worst has not come," observed cautious Max. "I'd like to know what frightened that bear in the underbrush, a while ago."

"He got scared at his own shadow," laughed Fred. "It's a wonder he didn't drop the fish. Great Cesar! look what a carcass, boys."

Well might Fred make use of the exclamation, for the dead grizzly was a monster of his kind, and looked doubly huge in the mellow moonlight in which he lay.

Being Californians, and used somewhat to camp life, the three castaways began to skin their prize, for they desired to discuss some juicy bear-steaks.

"Now for the best supper these mountains

afford!" and Fred began to cut off the haunch. "I tell you, boys—"

"For mercy's sake, look yonder!" interposed Max.

Fred looked up.

"What is it? I see nothing," he said.

"Neither do I, now; but as sure as I have eyes, I saw an Indian's head above yon rock."

"An Indian!" and Ned and Fred leaped to their feet. "Grizzlies first, red-skins next—that's the way it is likely to go in this wild region."

CHAPTER III.

FRED ON THE INDIAN'S TRAIL.

INSPECTION indicated that Max had seen the shadow of an Indian's head on the whitened surface of the boulder, and not the head itself.

Fred was inclined to attribute it all to fright, but Max persisted that he had seen something, and the three boys returned in no high spirits to the bear.

As hunger had to be appeased despite their situation, some choice steaks were cut from the carcass, and a fire built in the interior of the cabin.

Ned and Max kept guard at the opening while Fred roasted the meat to a turn, after which he invited them to the most delicious of repasts to which, need we say, the trio did full justice.

That night there was destined to be no sleep in Grizzly Camp.

The boys had employment that kept them awake.

The shadow on the rock was enough to keep sleep from their eyes, and while they watched they planned in low voices for the future.

Fortunately the night passed away without an alarm of any kind; the distant wolf-howls did not disturb the occupants of Grizzly Camp, for the sneaking pack kept its distance, although they made the entire night resound with their dismal cries.

When day broke again Fred visited the rock where Max had seen something the night before.

"Max was right," suddenly ejaculated the boy, staring at the unmistakable impression of a moccasin in the yielding ground. "Our danger lies just here: If the Indian is alone he will doubtless tell his companions when he joins them that Grizzly Camp is inhabited by three boys. The trail leads toward the river. I will follow it a short distance, and see what becomes of it."

The trail left by the red-skin was plain enough to be followed by a youth of Fred's experience in mountain craft, and, nothing daunted, the boy resolved to see what became of it.

He did not stop to consider that more or less hazard was attached to the following of an Indian trail in the Cascade country.

He had the safety of the camp and the lives of his companions uppermost in his mind.

In less than five minutes after leaving the boulder, Fred had put a little wooded rise between him and camp, but continued to press on.

The river, which was a rapid tributary of the

Columbia, was about half a mile from the cabin.

It was a narrow and very swift stream, rushing with great force between its banks which in many places were steep and perpendicular. This tributary which on account of its current the boys had several days before dubbed Rapid River, entered the Columbia some miles away, and eventually poured its waters into the Pacific.

The Indian's trail led Fred straight toward the river, and he at last reached its western bank at a spot where it was bridged in a natural manner by a huge tree, like the tall ones seen elsewhere in the country.

There instantly rushed across the boy's mind the idea that the red spy had crossed the river on the tree, and this thought was speedily confirmed, for the trail led to the trunk itself.

Fred halted at the tree and threw wistful glances across the stream.

He was anxious to know in which direction the red-skin had moved after striking the opposite bank.

Having ascertained this, he could go back to camp and report to his companions.

The trunk of the tree at the point where it had broken off was not less than ten feet in diameter. It made an excellent foot bridge, although at times the foliage that still remained upon it was very dense, miniature thickets, so to speak.

For Fred to discuss the feasibility of crossing the river on the tree was to undertake the task, and having looked to his weapons he sprang upon the mountain giant.

A minute later he was moving forward.

Two hundred feet beneath him rushed the river in a state of wildness, foaming and boiling with a roar at intervals almost deafening.

Fred had but to look downward to tighten his hold on the limbs and steady himself as he advanced inch by inch toward the distant bank.

He reached the middle of the foot-bridge without accident and halted for breath.

The densest foliage to be found on the body of the tree now surrounded him. He could not see twelve feet ahead, and the limbs had closed behind him, obscuring entirely his starting-place.

To a boy less courageous than Fred Nichols, the situation would have been one of the most unpleasant kind, but it did not deter him.

"There are real thickets on this bridge," he said to himself. "I wonder that the Indian did not clear a path with his hatchet."

Scarcely had he finished when a noise from toward the bank he had lately left attracted his attention, and his first look backward he perceived the limbs shake as if some person was moving forward.

"I'm in a predicament if the Indian is behind me!" ejaculated Fred, as he strained his eyes to obtain a glimpse of the living object which was undoubtedly advancing along the tree.

Turning his body and bracing it as best he was able, he cocked his rifle and awaited results.

The shaking of the limbs increased, and the boy's heart beat anxiously when he knew that a few more seconds would reveal the enemy.

All at once the foliage scarcely twenty feet away was parted, and the castaway of Grizzly Camp saw not the painted head of an Indian, but the homely mug of a bear!

"Another Grizzly!" fell from Fred's lips, and a moment later a smile appeared on his countenance—a smile for the ludicrousness attached to his situation.

Astonishment was depicted in the grizzly's eyes, for he had come upon a person for whom he was not looking.

"If he withdraws, he will be permitted to depart in peace," resumed Fred; "but if he advances he will surely run against a bullet."

For several minutes boy and bear eyed each other above the seething torrent that rushed between the river's banks.

It promised to be a test of endurance, as well as mental study of strength.

At first sight of the bear, Fred had raised his rifle, and, with the piece resting in a fork straight ahead, he had Old Ephraim completely covered.

The boy's fingers itched to press the trigger, and send the shaggy monster rolling from the tree into the rapid current below; but there was a possibility of failing to deliver a death-shot even at that distance, so Fred waited for the grizzly to make a movement.

At last, as if satisfied that no very serious obstacle blocked his way, the bear gave a grunt and came forward again.

"You've sealed your doom, old captain!" exclaimed Fred, as his cheek dropped to his rifle-stock.

At that moment he touched the trigger, and with a terrible bowl of pain the huge animal rolled aside and caught madly at the limbs that brushed his hide.

Fred leaned forward with his heart in his throat.

The bear had not fallen from the tree, and might be desperately wounded, and in a condition to attack him.

But no! Bruin's days were numbered. Even as Fred looked, the limbs gave way before his great weight, and the huge carcass shot toward the river, turning over and over in its swift descent.

Old Ephraim struck the water and threw toward the interested watcher far above a column of spray and foam; then his body was seen for a moment longer, when it disappeared beneath the boiling flood!

Fred let slip a breath of relief, and sent a look of defiance toward the bank he had lately left.

If there were any more bears to try the bridge he was ready to encounter them.

But none presented themselves, and after a few moments Fred resumed his journey, and reached the bank for which he had set out.

The ground there was soft enough to show the impress of a moccasin, provided a human foot filled it; but the youth was somewhat chagrined at finding nothing of the kind.

He stuck to the tree and went on, nor left it until he reached the top, where he examined the ground again, but with the same result.

Fred was puzzled; his countenance told

plainly that the red-skin had completely out-generated him.

Despairing of recovering the trail, the boy trapper leaned against a tree, and resolved to rest a few minutes before setting out on his return to camp.

He was now in a wood whose soil he had never trod before.

Giant trees without a limb under sixty feet from the ground grew around him, and the soil was carpeted with soft rich grass entirely different from that which grew east of Rapid River.

It was morning in the wild woods of northern Oregon, and Fred quite forgot the infamy that had made him a castaway in a region where danger lurked in every shadow.

He would have been satisfied if he could have recovered the Indian's trail, but, with the art of his people, the red-skin had deftly concealed it, and, for aught Fred knew, might be many miles away.

Fred at last resolved to go back to Grizzly Camp.

There was work to be done there.

He had formed a plan which he was certain Max and Ned would approve of, and he was anxious to lay it before them.

He was about to quit the tree when the queerest of sounds struck his ear, and he felt his hat lifted from his head.

The boy started from the tree with a startling cry, which was cut short when he turned.

His hat indeed had been taken from his head, but it had not fallen to the ground; it had been pinned to the tree by an Indian arrow!

Fred looked at it but for a second, and then wheeled with the click of his rifle's lock.

"Where is the red-skin who fired that arrow?" he exclaimed. "I am alone, but I am not afraid. Where is the red coward, I say? Let him face Fred Nichols if he dare!"

The boy spoke apparently to the trees alone, for there was no response.

CHAPTER IV.

BACK IN CAMP—A FATAL DISCOVERY.

FRED'S blood was hot; his eyes seemed to flash fire.

Behind him was his hat still pinned to the tree by the feathered shaft which had barely missed his head; in his front, trees—nothing but trees.

He was puzzled to know from whence the arrow had come.

It had doubtless been fired from a goodly distance, for he had not heard the twang of the bow-string; the only noise he had heard was the hiss of the shaft as it cut the air above his head.

"Well," resumed Fred, after waiting several minutes for a response to his challenge, "well, if you are determined to keep behind a sheltering tree you may and remain a coward to your dying day. You dare not show yourself. I'm here to fight you in any manner you like."

Fred's words died away in far-off echoes, and the next moment he was walking toward the natural bridge with his rifle still cocked in his hands.

"If all the Indians in these parts are as sneaking as that one, Grizzly Camp is apt to have trouble with them," he said, in audible tones. "By Jove! I've forgotten my hat. The red-skin sha'n't carry it off as a trophy."

The youth wheeled and went back to the tree, from which he wrenched the arrow, although the iron barb was deeply imbedded in the wood, and put on his hat, after which he turned toward that part of the wood from which the shaft had come, and broke the arrow above his head.

"Now for camp!"

He walked boldly toward the tree-bridge with eyes on the alert, and once more put his foot upon it.

This time he believed there would be no grizzly to follow him; if he was molested at all, it would be by an enemy to be feared more than the mountain monsters of the cascades.

The young Californian cast more than one anxious glance over his shoulder as he advanced along the tree, for, to tell the truth, he expected to be followed by the unseen marksman.

He looked once down among the waters, but did not see the bear.

The grizzly's huge carcass had long since disappeared, and was doubtless miles from the spot.

"There's a river between us anyhow," thought Fred, as he stepped from the tree on the safe side of the stream, and without waiting to make further investigations he hastened toward camp.

We need not mention that his arrival was hailed with joy by Ned and Max, for Fred had overstayed his time, and the two boys were getting anxious when he made his appearance.

Fred related his adventure with the bear as well as the incident of the mysterious arrow, to all of which his companions listened with breathless attention.

"We have made a singular discovery, too," announced Ned, when Fred had spun his somewhat thrilling yarn. "This old cabin stands over the entrance to a cave which looks like the mouth of an old mine."

Fred uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"How came you to discover it?" he asked.

"We were examining the puncheons on the floor with a view to utilizing several of them for a door," was the reply, "and the removal of one disclosed an opening which we saw at once had been made by the hand of man a long time ago."

"And you then inspected the cavern?"

"We did not, but concluded to defer the inspection until your return. You are here now, and we will see what is in the unexpected discovery. You have heard the story of the Lost Mine, Fred?"

"Yes, but it isn't supposed to be in this part of the country, if I heard aright."

"But very little is known about it," said Max.

"The only living man who knows anything about it is, you know, hopelessly mad in the hospital at Los Angeles. Old Blue, the mean old rat who deserted us yesterday, used to declare that the Lost Mine is somewhere in Ore-

gon; but I will admit, Fred, that he really knows no more about it than we. But let us throw conjecture to the winds, and see what our 'find' reveals."

While Max was talking, Ned removed a certain puncheon from its place, and revealed to the young bear-killer's gaze a dark opening large enough to receive the body of a man.

"See! the first stage isn't deep," Ned exclaimed, leaping into the pit and laughing at Fred's astonishment.

The boy's head and shoulders were elevated above the opening, but he informed Fred that below him was the real entrance to a cave whose dimensions were not known.

A torch was quickly improvised, and, with several others in reserve, the three Castaways descended to the cave proper, and fearlessly crossed the threshold.

Always foremost in expeditions of danger, Fred Nichols had placed himself at the head of the little band, and with the torch in one hand and a revolver in the other, he crept down the damp corridor deeper and deeper into the recesses of the mysterious place.

For more than ten minutes the boys were compelled to advance in a crouching position, for the ceiling of the corridor was quite low, and the passage was so narrow that they had to move in Indian file, that is, one behind the other.

At last, however, a light cry from Fred proclaimed that the gloomy corridor had terminated, and a moment later the three boys stood in a chamber whose dimensions the flambéau did not for a short time reveal.

Gradually the aspects of the place became visible, and, in order to wholly relieve the gloom, the other torches were lighted.

"It is the Lost Mine!" suddenly exclaimed Ned, as he stooped and picked up an object that possessed a singular glitter when held in a certain place.

"Mica! You don't call *that* gold, do you, Ned?"

"No, but gold may be near it," was the reply. "If what I just picked up is mica, what do you call this?"

Fred Nichols did not reply, but, with dilating eyes, took the rough rock from Ned's hand and began to examine it closely.

The youth had spent many weeks among the richest mines of California, and had acquired a good deal of information about the precious metals in their rough state; therefore, when he took the rock from Ned's hand with a curious cast of countenance, it was evident that there was something in it.

Ned did not speak for some time.

When he again looked up into his companions' faces he uttered a word that thrilled them.

"It is gold!" he declared. "This rock in my hand is almost solid gold."

"Hurrah!" shouted Ned. "We have rediscovered the famous Lost Mine, and it now belongs to us."

"Not so fast," said Max. "Let us inspect the entire place. The nugget may be a stray one, and—"

"A stray one! What do you say to this?"

Ned was holding in his hand another nugget almost as large as the one Fred had just passed on, and his eyes were snapping with triumph.

Need we say that the boys stood dazed by the wonderful discovery they had made?

Ned and Max had great confidence in Fred's judgment when it came to gold-bearing quartz, and they were ready to believe that they had accidentally rediscovered the wonderful mine which had been "lost" for years, and in search of which hundreds of intrepid men had risked life and squandered fortunes.

They felt like thanking Tucson Tom and his companions for deserting them in the wild Cascade country.

Ned, in an outburst of enthusiasm, even declared that they would hunt up the rascally trio, and instead of paying them for their villainy, give them ten thousand apiece!

If the rocks were as valuable as Fred regarded them, there could be no end to the wealth just unearthed.

The floor seemed paved with them, and an examination of one of the walls of the chamber threw Fred into ecstasies.

"Hello! here's another corridor!" suddenly cried Ned, and the little party rushed into the narrow place.

This discovery proved to be a narrow passageway, which led the eager boys by numerous turns into a room smaller than the one first found, and not so rich in golden rocks.

It was the end of the journey, for the new room possessed but one outlet, and by that the one they had entered it.

All at once a dull noise like the falling of a mass of earth startled the boys; it drove every vestige of color from their faces.

"Come!" cried Fred. "We may be imprisoned in this place!"

Horrible was the thought!

It drove the gold finders forward at the top of their speed, and with their hearts in their throats.

They all entered the gold-room at the same time and dashed across it.

A moment later Fred, who was slightly in the advance, recoiled with a cry.

"We are buried alive!" was his horrified ejaculation. "We have found the Lost Mine, only to make it our living grave!"

This terrible state of affairs seemed all too true.

The noise which had sent a nameless chill to their hearts had been occasioned by the fall of a mass of dirt and rock, which effectually blocked up the corridor leading to the old cabin!

For several minutes after Fred's exclamation the Castaways stood speechless in the glare of the torches, almost ready to fall from their hands.

"What is this?" suddenly cried Max, breaking the silence as he sprung upon a certain object on the floor of the cavern.

Ned and Fred leaped instantly to his side and stared at his "find," which he held up to their gaze.

It was nothing less than a beautiful hunting-knife of Indian make, and its burnished blade and clean horn handle told that it had not been buried in the earth that had fallen.

Each boy knew that it was not on the floor of the gold-room when they first visited it, and the longer they gazed at the knife the deeper became the mystery.

Fred's thoughts wandered back to the red-skin who had pinned his hat to the tree; but he could not connect that event with the finding of the knife.

"We will call it a god-send, anyhow!" snatching the knife from Max's hand and running with it toward the obstructed corridor. "We will make this knife help us to safety!"

With this he valiantly attacked the debris, and began to cut his way through the accumulated earth.

Suddenly he uttered a cry of disappointment, and, turning to his comrades, held up his right hand.

It now held but the *handle* of the Indian knife; the blade had struck a stone and snapped at the hilt!

It was the most precarious moment of the Castaways' existence.

Ned and Max were ready to despair, but Fighting Fred was not.

CHAPTER V.

THE "CHIMNEY" AND WHAT IT CONTAINED.

THE breaking of the knife was enough to discourage the boys.

A great deal of dirt lay between them and safety.

It is true that, according to Fred's judgment, a vast amount of gold surrounded them; but, in their present critical situation, it amounted to nothing.

The young Castaways forgot the yellow nuggets in their desire to escape from their underground prison.

Strange to say, they experienced no inconvenience from the air they were compelled to breathe; although they were many feet below the surface of the earth, the atmosphere seemed pure and bracing.

A light wind fanned the flames of their torches and greatly puzzled them.

"There is an outlet somewhere to the open air," said Fred, taking new hope from the current of wind that kissed his cheeks. "The cool air seems to come from some point overhead. We have not inspected the ceiling of this chamber. Let us do so now."

"But how?" asked Max. "I can not reach it with the light of my torch, though I hold it as high as I can."

"I will try it. Here, boys, stand together and let me get upon your shoulders."

"Here we are, Fred."

With little difficulty the young grizzly-slayer mounted to the shoulders of his companions, and held the torch as high above his head as possible.

"I see a dark opening above me," he said.

"A strong current of air comes from it."

"It is the chimney of this underground house!" explained Ned. "Can't you get into it?"

"Not quite," was the answer. "If my arms were a foot longer, I might accomplish the feat."

"Come down and we'll soon remedy that."

Fred leaped to the ground, and the three boys began to collect the stones that lay scattered about the cave.

These soon formed a respectable heap, on top of which Ned and Max braced themselves, and helped their companion to mount to their shoulders gain.

"The chimney is a hollow tree!" suddenly exclaimed Fred. "There seem to be niches along its sides, as though some person had been used to climbing up!"

"I can understand the mystery of the fresh air now," answered Max. "If it wasn't asking too much of you, Fred, we'd urge you to ascend the hollow."

"That's just what I'm going to do," came back the response, and the youth drew himself up into the opening he had discovered.

Ned and Max saw his feet disappear, and then lowered their faces to keep from their eyes the dirt knocked down by Fred.

For some time no word came back from the boy in the chimney, and the twain left in the cave were beginning to believe that he had vanished forever.

At last his heels reappeared at the mouth of the opening, and then his body was seen.

The two boys hailed Fred with exclamations of delight.

"I must have climbed sixty feet up the old chimney," the young adventurer said addressing his comrades. "One can ascend very readily by bracing his feet against the sides of the tree which have been used in that manner before. I don't know how high the hollow extends, probably more than a hundred feet. I went up to an opening almost as large as my body. It is through it that we get the fresh air we breathe here. If we had a long rope we might escape by means of the hole in the tree, but we do not possess a single cord."

"Alas! no," ejaculated Max. "After all the discovery of the chimney does not facilitate escape."

Fred was about to make an observation when a quantity of half-decayed wood fell at their feet, and caused them to elevate their gaze as though they expected to see a live object in the chimney.

"You must have loosened that dirt during your explorations," said Ned, addressing Fred.

"I think not. I recollect that while at the hole of which I have spoken, I heard a peculiar noise overhead, and had some dirt like this fall on my shoulders. My opinion is that something is up the tree."

"An animal of some kind, probably," said Ned.

"Or a red-skin. Remember the knife we picked up here awhile ago."

Ned and Max uttered exclamations of horror.

"I'll find out what it is," resumed Fred, drawing his revolver. "I never leave a mystery till I have solved it."

"What are you going to do?" queried Ned, clutching his arm.

"I'm going to shoot up the tree," and Fred jerked himself loose and leaped upon the pyramid of stones.

The next moment a dull report resounded

throughout the cave, and Fred stepped back to await results.

The pistol-shot was followed by the fall of some more dirt, and then something struck a bare stone, and left a glistening stain there.

"Blood!" exclaimed Fred, holding his torch close to the spot, and looking at his companions. "Didn't I tell you there was a live something up the chimney?"

The boys stared at the crimson spot for a moment, or until another joined it, when they sprung back and stared into the opening above.

"Shall I try again?" asked Fred, cocking his revolver once more.

"No! no!" said Max. "The person may be deadly wounded already."

"The person? What makes you speak thus, Max?"

"The knife we found on the floor of this cave!"

Fred Nichols did not deliver the second shot, but stepped back and fastened his eyes on the opening.

All at once great quantities of dirt began to fall upon the stones.

"The What-is-it is coming down," Fred exclaimed. There is no telling what is about to happen. Get ready to receive him, boys. We may have to fight for our lives in the Lost Mine!"

Fred's words were not needed to put his companions on the defensive; they had already drawn their revolvers, and were watching the dark orifice overhead.

It was plainly evident that an object of some kind was coming down the tree, not very fast, to be sure, but fast enough to keep the boys excited.

"You will fire when I give the word," said Fred. "Don't throw a single shot away."

The boys held their torches in their left hands and their revolvers in their right.

The suspense was broken rather abruptly, for two strange-looking objects suddenly made their appearance and hung for a moment in mid-air, below the bottom of the chimney.

"Ready!" cried Fred.

"Hold!" exclaimed Ned. "Those are a man's feet."

"And an Indian's at that!" and putting up his revolver, Fred leaped upon the stones and seized the dangling objects.

Under other circumstances Ned and Max might have laughed at their companion pulling on the human feet, but the situation was too serious to provoke even a smile.

All at once Fred fell backward as a human body dropped from the opening, and the twain rolled from the pyramid to the floor of the gold-room.

Ned and Max sprung instantly to Fred's assistance, and halted over the stranger, at whose head they presented their revolvers.

"Surrender!" demanded Ned. "You are at our mercy and we will not hesitate to kill if you make a show of resistance."

"Lean Wolf no resist," was the response.

"Him shot in the tree by white boy."

"An Indian, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Max.

An Indian it was, but so covered with the dirt of the tree as to be scarcely recognizable.

The boys, however, saw a pair of gleaming black eyes, and after a brief inspection a lithe and well-made body.

"You were hunting us, Lean Wolf," said Fred to the Indian. "When you went up the tree you dropped your knife on the floor."

"Mebbe so," was the response.

"Aren't you the fellow who pinned my hat to the tree this morning?"

The red-skin shook his head.

"Don't know anything about that circumstance, eh?" continued Fred. "Well, all I have to say about that trick is that I propose to get even with the fellow who did it. You say you are wounded. Where?"

The red-skin held out his right arm.

"Winged, I see."

Lean Wolf nodded.

"We'll soon fix you up if you're worth the doctoring," laughed Fred. "How long is that rope you've got wrapped around your body?"

"Pretty long, mebbe."

"Will it reach from the hole in the tree to the ground?"

"Mebbe so."

"Why didn't you try it instead of coming down the tree?"

"Lean Wolf's arm too bad."

An examination showed that the bullet fired up the chimney by Fred had penetrated the Indian's arm, cracking, if not breaking, the principal bone, thereby inflicting a painful wound.

The lining of the boys' coats furnished material for bandages, and with a good deal of surgical skill, Fred dressed the injured member.

Becoming communicative during the operation, the Indian gave the boys to understand that he was a member of the Shoshone nation, and that a hunting-party was not far away.

The Shoshones were the very Indians the boys had to fear, for they had lately relinquished their obligations to the Government, and committed some inhuman barbarities.

Lean Wolf did not carry a very prepossessing countenance; Ned remarked to Max that he looked much like the animal whose name he bore; and Fred summed him up for a red-skin who could not be trusted.

He said that he had accidentally discovered the opening leading from the cabin to the gold-room, where he was at the time of the fall of the earth that cut off his retreat.

He declared that he had never entered the cave before, but the seventy feet of good lariat rope which he carried around his body, gave the lie to this declaration.

The boys were anxious to escape from their imprisonment, and guided by Lean Wolf they worked their way up the tree to the opening.

Despite his wounded arm, the Shoshone adjusted the rope for descent, and in less than an hour the three boys stood near the old cabin again at the foot of the tree.

After them the red-skin descended, and coolly wrapped the rope about his body again.

"Lean Wolf go now," he said, and before the grateful boys could reply, or detain him in any way, he was disappearing in the forest.

"We'll see that fellow again," said Fred to his companions. "If he doesn't deserve the

name he bears, then set me down for a know-nothing."

CHAPTER VI.

FRED'S SHOT—THE WARNING.

NEED we say that the sudden disappearance of Lean Wolf excited alarm in Grizzly Camp?

The three Castaways felt that he would re-join the hunting-party he had mentioned, and acquaint them with the condition of the place.

In that event, they would soon be visited and subjected to a great deal of trouble.

The boys began to prepare for the worst.

After discussing a breakfast of bear-meat, they began to construct a door out of the means at hand, and before noon had erected one which, if not very handsome, possessed one admirable feature—strength.

They next proceeded to make loop holes between the logs, and arranged the puncheons on the ground so that in case of rapid firing by the enemy, they could retire to the opening leading to the cave.

All these preparations were deemed necessary by the events that had lately taken place, and before night the old cabin had been placed in a good state of defense.

"We shall not be visited to-night; but the visit will surely come," remarked Fred, when they had finished their work. "If the earth had not fallen into the corridor we could retire to it in case of danger, and bid defiance to the whole Shoshone nation. Then, the tree would answer for a lookout, and we would have been well fixed. But fortune has determined otherwise, perhaps for our own good—who shall say?"

That night the boys shut themselves up in the cabin with many misgivings.

It was the second night of their abandonment in the wild Cascade country; the first one had been disturbed by the visit of the big grizzly, and this was likely to record more exciting scenes.

But it passed away without an adventure of any kind, and the boys, who grew tired of watching and fell asleep near dawn, awoke to see the sunshine streaming through the loop-holes.

Another night and still another passed away in like manner, and when the sun went down on the fourth day the boys had recovered from their fears, and began to plan some little excursions in search of game in the surrounding country.

They cleaned their weapons and looked carefully to their supply of ammunition; then, after the usual routine of story-telling, shut themselves up within their castle to pass another night.

The moon came up round and full, and the last bird among the mountain foliage ceased her warbling and dropped asleep on the bough.

It was Fred's turn to mount guard, and for a long time he stood at one of the loop-holes and watched the weird, moon-lit landscape that stretched before his gaze.

Nothing glided across the line of his vision—not even a sneaking wolf from the pack that occasionally howled up among the mountains.

At last the boy guard felt his limbs giving way beneath him, and, unconscious, he sunk to the floor asleep.

How long Fred slept he did not know, but long enough to have several exciting dreams, the last of which startled him from his slumbers, and he sprang up, but without disturbing his companions.

He chided himself for having dropped asleep on his post, and his first movement was to the loop-hole at which he had watched till sleep overcame him.

The next moment an exclamation of wonderment dropped from Fred's lips.

He could not see from the cabin. Could it be that the moon had gone down and that the landscape was wrapped in gloom?

He glided to the left and found another loop-hole through which he could see the ghostly figures of the tall trees that grew in front of the hut.

Nothing suspicious attracted his attention, but, somewhat puzzled, he went back to the first opening and applied his eye to it again.

This time his view was unobstructed, but suddenly, while he looked through the port, he saw a figure moving toward the river half a mile away.

For several seconds Fred could not credit the evidence of sight, but he was forced to do so, for the longer he gazed the more distinctly he saw the moving object.

"It is that mean Indian Lean Wolf," exclaimed Fred. "He had his ear at the port a minute ago, and that is why I could not see anything. I knew he would come back. Ha! he has stopped and appears to be waiting for some one. What's that object approaching him? Another red-skin! I guess we are in for it now."

Even as Fred spoke the person who had just left the cabin was joined by a figure that came from his left, and the two stood close together near a tree, but boldly in the moonlight.

"I've got a notion to spoil that confab," resumed Fred after watching the pair for a moment. "If we are going to have war, I might as well open it. I will not waken the boys; my rifle will do that."

When he concluded the bear-killer thrust his rifle through the port-hole and took deliberate aim at the man who had just listened at the logs of the cabin.

The pair presented a good target, for they did not stand more than thirty yards away, and so close together that the boy marksman could not miss.

Fred sent over the barrel before he pressed the trigger an audible wish for good luck, then the crack of his weapon awoke the echoes of the night.

One of the figures sprang into the air with a piercing cry, and fell back to earth, while the other recoiled and turned toward the cabin.

Ned and Max were on their feet in an instant.

"What's the matter?" they cried at the same breath.

"Look out yonder at that tableau," said Fred. "You can't see a part of it very distinctly, for one of the men is lying on the

ground with a bullet in his breast if my rifle did not fail me, the other has not recovered from the effects of the shot. I think I gave Lean Wolf his quietus, but since I've been looking at his companion he looks like a white man."

"He is not an Indian!" cried Ned. "Whoever he is he shows a good deal of bravery, for he is stooping over his companion. See! he is lifting him from the ground."

"Yes," responded Fred, "he is going to carry him away. I will not object to that if he keeps his distance hereafter. But sneaks must remain from Grizzly Camp if they desire whole skins."

From the loop-holes the three boys could see the unwounded night prowler shoulder his companion, and start with the body toward the river.

They watched him in silence, and with a great deal of curiosity, and did not speak again until he had passed out of sight.

"What do you think now, Fred?" questioned Max. "Do you think your victim was Lean Wolf?"

"I do not know," was the reply. "I know one thing—that I shot a person who came here for no good. We've got to protect Grizzly Camp from all intruders, whether they walk on four legs or two. Time will tell who got my bullet to-night."

Ned's watch told the boys that it was a little past midnight, and it was resolved to close no eye till dawn.

The interior of the cabin was quite gloomy, for the moon had dropped behind a spur of one of the mountains, and no longer threw her mellow light in at the port-holes.

An hour passed away when all of a sudden a single blow sounded on the heavy door, and quickly died away.

The three boys, wide awake and ready for an emergency of any kind, sprang forward, but saw no one moving across the ground in front of the cabin.

The blow mystified them, the more so because it was not repeated, and they dared not go outside to investigate it.

Morning came at last, and Fred laid his hand on the barricades.

"I'm going to know something about what happened last night," he said glancing at Ned and Max.

No objection was raised to his resolve, and the heavy barricades were removed, and the door opened wide enough to let Fred put his head out.

"It's just about what I had an idea it was!" he exclaimed a moment later. "Here's a paper pinned to the door with a knife."

Ned and Max uttered exclamations of astonishment.

"Here is the document, boys," and Fred, drawing back into the cabin, displayed to his companions' gaze a dirty piece of paper on which there was some rough writing.

Eagerly did the Castaways of Grizzly Camp bear the paper to one of the loop-holes, and bend forward to master the inscription.

The task was not a difficult one, for the handwriting, though rough, was plain and consisted of these startling words:

"You youngsters will soon wish you had never

been born. If you've got any grit, now is the time to show it. Leave Grizzly Camp within the next twenty-four hours, or take what comes after that! We mean bizness!"

Fred read the warning aloud, and when he looked at his companions his eyes fairly flashed.

"That's plain language, boys," he said. "Of course no Indian ever wrote it. These letters look like some I've seen before."

"Whose were they, Fred?"

"Old Blue's."

Ned started.

"Then you mean to say that the three villains who abandoned us a few days since are hanging around yet?"

"That's the way it looks. But I don't care who posted that notice. We're not going away within twenty-four hours, nor in forty-eight. Like Grant, I'm willing to fight it out on this line. Grizzly Camp is the safest place I know of, and here I propose to stay till driven out, if I am to leave at all."

Ned and Max applauded Fred's resolve.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW ADVENTURES—WATANAMA'S REVENGE.

If Tucson Tom and his companions had returned to the neighborhood of Grizzly Camp, what had brought them back?

It was barely possible that they suspected the whereabouts of the mine which the boys had discovered by the merest accident, and they might have abandoned the camp for the purpose of driving the young Californians away.

If the latter supposition was the case, they had failed, for, as we have seen, the Castaways were sticking close to the old camp.

Of course the warning pinned to the cabin door by the hunting-knife had been written by a white man, most probably by the person called Old Blue by Fred.

The threats only strengthened the boys' determination, and Fred spoke the sentiments of all when he declared that they would not depart "in twenty-four hours nor in forty-eight."

They had a good supply of bear-meat on hand and were tolerably well fixed for a siege; but they were forced to admit that the cabin could not withstand a protracted attack.

Fred was anxious to know whether the shot fired the previous night had proved fatal and shortly after the reception of the warning, he proceeded to the spot where his victim had fallen.

He found on the ground some particles of dried blood, and a slight trail of crimson led toward the river.

The boy trapper did not follow it, but returned to the cabin and reported to his companions.

"We ought to reconnoiter the vicinity a little," he said. "If the enemy is lurking hereabouts, we should not be ignorant of his position or numbers."

It was then agreed that Max and Fred should undertake a short reconnoitering expedition while Ned remained in camp.

Armed with what weapons could be spared for the purpose, the two boys bade Ned adieu and set off toward the river.

Fred, very naturally leading the way, selected the route toward the tree on which he had encountered the grizzly.

He believed that the man who had carried his victim off the field had gone in that direction, and he expected to discover evidences that he had crossed the foot-bridge with his burden.

Max had never seen the tree, and his curiosity concerning it was naturally very great.

"Halt!" said Fred in low tones when they had nearly reached the bank of Rapid river. "Look straight ahead, Max, about thirty rods and tell me what you see."

Max who had cocked his rifle immediately upon his friend's "halt" looked in the direction indicated for a minute and then spoke:

"I see nothing but a clump of bushes that almost conceal the stump of a tree," he said.

"I see them, too, but do you not see something beyond the bushes?"

"I see nothing."

"Can it be that my eyes have deceived me?" queried Fred gazing intently ahead.

"What did you think you saw?"

"I hardly know. It might be a man or a grizzly. I certainly saw something move on the further side of the bushes."

"A shot in that direction might solve the mystery," suggested Max.

"No, no!" quickly responded Fred. "I have been mistaken, I guess. Let us go forward and investigate."

With their fingers at the triggers of their rifles and eyes on the alert, the two boys moved cautiously forward.

"At the first glimpse of a living thing raise your gun," Fred said. "We cannot be too quick in this country. On a man's alertness depends his life; remember that, Max."

The young Californians continued to advance upon the clump of bushes, and were only a few feet from it when all at once a living figure sprang into view.

Up went the two rifles and the triggers would have been pressed, if a startling cry from Fred had not prevented.

"Don't shoot, Max! It is an Indian girl!"

Having made the same discovery announced by his companion, Max was already lowering his rifle while he stared at the person who stood beyond the bushes staring at them, with fright and wonderment commingled in her eyes.

For a moment the red girl threatened to fly from the spot, but second thought and the rapid advance of the boys restrained her, and they soon came up.

In person the young creature was beautiful for an Indian. She was apparently sixteen, tall, and straight as a red skin's lance, and possessed black hair and eyes.

She was well dressed in soft doeskin garments, the frock of which was fringed with beads as were also the moccasins that incased her shapely feet.

In short, this young girl might have passed for an Indian fairy, and the boys almost forgot to address her in their admiration of her figure.

"We came near shooting you," said Fred at last. "My friend here wanted to send a bullet among the bushes before you rose."

Instead of replying, the Indian maid smiled slightly and her pretty eyes twinkled merrily.

"What is your name?" continued the young bear-killer.

"Watanama is the Star of the Shoshones."

"A star, eh?" and Fred laughed as he glanced at Max. "This is discovering a planet in the daytime. Well, Watanama, we are glad to see you. Where are your people?"

The girl turned and waved her hand toward the western horizon.

"They are yonder, pale boys," she said in very good English. "They are many, and the big game fall before their arrows."

"Lean Wolf's hunting-party," said Max. "We may obtain some information of that red rascal from the Star of the Shoshones."

At mention of Lean Wolf's name, Watanama started and cast a frightened glance behind her; it did not escape the boys' eyes.

"Watanama is Lean Wolf's sister," she said. "He wants her to become Red Crow's squaw, but Watanama will never build his fires."

"A case of unrequited love," smiled Fred.

Watanama did not notice the remark, but proceeded:

"Red Crow is with the big hunting-party of the Shoshones. He has sworn by the Great Spirit that Watanama shall become his squaw, and Lean Wolf, her brother, has said the same. They made Watanama go with them on the hunt with the other women, who were to dress the skins and cure the meat. She could not stay in her lodge, for they tied her upon a pony and took her along. Last night Watanama left the red hunters; she does not want to go back any more, for sooner than build Red Crow's fires she will leap into the swift-running river yonder."

"Do you think Red Crow is looking for you now?" asked Max.

"He will throw himself on Watanama's trail," was the answer. "He may be near now."

"Look yonder!" ejaculated Fred, who had glanced toward the river, then but a few rods away. "Down—down! somebody is crossing the tree on which I shot the grizzly."

The trio instantly dropped to the ground, and fastened their eyes on the tree bridge which was in plain view from the spot.

The moving of the foliage in the middle of the tree indicated the advance of some object, but whether brute or human it was impossible to tell.

It was likely that the figure would develop into a huge grizzly before many minutes, and in breathless expectancy the trio watched the shaking limbs.

All at once something that was not a paw separated those near the bank, and a moment thereafter the painted face and bare shoulders of a red-skin made their appearance.

The apparition was startling enough to bring exclamations to the lips of the beholders, and when the full figure of the Indian appeared in view, Max felt his rifle jerked rudely from his hand.

"It is Red Crow!" rung suddenly from Wata-

nama's throat, and before Max could arrest her intention the gun was at her shoulder.

Fred sprung up and attempted to seize the rifle; but before he could touch it a loud report rung out on the morning air, and the form of the stalwart red-skin fell back among the foliage of the tree.

The capture of the gun and the shot had not occupied three seconds; one had followed the other in lightning succession.

The Star of the Shoshones did not try to retain possession of the rifle after her shot.

She turned to Max and thrust it into his hands, while her eyes fairly flashed.

"Red Crow did come, but Watanama will never be his squaw!" she exclaimed.

"You may have missed him," said Fred. "I am certain that he did not fall from the tree."

"Watanama will see!"

With this the Indian girl snatched from her belt the only weapon with which she was armed, a small hatchet, and bounded toward the tree.

Fred and Max hurried after her.

A few bounds brought Watanama to the tree, and as she leaped upon it, Fred uttered an exclamation of horror.

He had caught sight of the same object seen by the Indian girl—an Indian hanging with a death grip on the limbs over the river that seethed and rushed oceanward two hundred feet below!

He instantly divined Watanama's intentions, but could not frustrate them.

The red-skin was not dead, for the boys saw his eyes flash as the girl glided forward with uplifted hatchet.

"It was Watanama's bullet that spilled Red Crow's blood," hissed the Star of the Shoshones.

"He would take her to his lodge, but she will send him to the abode of the evil spirit."

Red Crow ground his teeth, but did not speak.

At that moment the girl stopped directly above him, and clutching a limb with her left hand, leaned toward him with the hatchet poised above her head.

Horried by the scene, the two boys held their breath.

Suddenly, and with resistless force, the hatchet descended toward the limb that sustained Red Crow's weight, and severed it at a single blow!

A wild cry broke from the warrior's throat, and while it still filled the ears of those who heard it, a human body shot toward the river with frightful velocity, and struck where the waters formed a whirlpool!

It was undoubtedly the end of a Shoshone brave!

Watanama turned to the boys with a gleam of victory in her eyes.

"What say the pale faces now?" she cried halting before them. "Will Watanama ever build fires in Red Crow's lodge?"

"I think you never will," said Fred; "but you might have spared the life of your lover."

"He would not have spared the Star of the Shoshones," was the quick retort. "Are the white boys alone in this country?"

"There are three of us," said Fred. "If you would see us all come with us to camp," and

turning on his heel, he took up the trail leading to Grizzly Camp.

Watanama followed without a word.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE VISITOR.

AFTER a few hours spent at Grizzly Camp, the Star of the Shoshones evinced no desire to go back to her kindred.

"Maybe we'd better let her stay," said Ned, during the consultation that followed between the three boys.

"Here is only another mouth to feed, and our bear-meat will last a long time. Then she knows all the Indian tricks, and if Lean Wolf and his brother-warriors should give us any trouble, she may prove an invaluable help. I am for letting her remain."

It was thus agreed by the young Castaways that Watanama should remain in Grizzly Camp until she saw fit to depart, and, having been informed of this resolve, she thanked the boys in a few modestly spoken words, and formally installed herself in the cabin.

As she possessed no weapons but the hatchet with which she had sent Red Crow swiftly to his doom, Fred pressed one of his revolvers upon her, though it was evident from her looks that she preferred one of the rifles.

"We must not forget that at the end of twenty-four hours from a certain time last night we will be troubled by the men who posted the notice on the cabin door," remarked Fred. "I firmly believe that Old Blue Mountain and his pards have sneaked back for some purpose or other, and that we will receive a visit from them before many hours."

"Let them come!" exclaimed Fred. "Now that we are on our guard, they will meet with a reception they will not soon forget."

When the Indian girl was made acquainted with the circumstances of the posting of the warning, she instantly recollected that that very morning she had seen two men along the river, and their garments indicated that they were whites.

"What did I tell you?" cried Fighting Fred, glancing at his companions.

"You are sure there were but two, Star?"

"Watanama saw only two then, but she thought she caught a glimpse of another man lying on some green limbs on the ground."

"The fellow I shot last night?"

"Did white boy shoot a pale-face?" queried the girl.

"I don't know about that, but I certainly hit a living target of some kind," answered Fred. "I mistook him for an Indian with whom you ought to be very well acquainted, since you are Lean Wolf's sister," and the young speaker smiled. "If you saw a man lying on some leaves this morning, I did not kill last night, I would like to know which one of the three I hit."

The day seemed destined to pass without any more incidents than those already recorded.

Watanama asked permission to prepare supper, and the manner in which she roasted the bear-meat made the boys wish that she could remain with them always.

The night coming on promised to be the most exciting one they had experienced since leaving home, and extra precautions were taken to insure safety and guard against a surprise.

"I would feel entirely satisfied with the arrangements if that tree were out of our way," said Max, pointing to a large maple that grew so near to the cabin that its wide-spreading branches touched the roof.

It was the only tree within thirty yards of the hut, and had probably been left standing for shade by the original builders.

Fred looked at the tree a moment, and then replied:

"If you had made that remark this morning, Max, we might have felled it, since the rascals left us one ax, but, as it is, we must let it stand awhile longer. I don't like its position myself; but we'll put up with it, and take the consequences."

Night came once more, this time with clouds, and a high wind that swayed the pines and hemlocks that dotted the rough landscape.

The prospect was not at all inviting, but the occupants of Grizzly Camp kept stout hearts in their bosoms, and mentally invoked the smiles of the Goddess of Fortune.

The wind increased until it sent the boughs of the old maple with terrible violence against the cabin roof, and whistled through the loop-holes like an irate demon.

"Watanama see heap o' nights like this," suddenly said the Indian girl amid the gloom of the hut.

"The worst is yet to come, I think," replied Fred. "If our enemies do not take advantage of this hurricane, I will not give them credit for good generalship."

"They come by'mby," responded the Shoshone.

Suddenly a noise that startled every one almost lifted them off their feet, and a small bough dropped upon Max's head from above.

"The storm has wrenched one of the heavy shingles off," the youth exclaimed, guessing aright the extent of the disaster. "If it were to rain now we should be deluged."

But not a drop struck the upturned faces of the anxious little group, who fully expected to see the cabin overturned by the next blast.

"What was that?" asked Ned's voice all at once, as a strange, yet almost human, cry cut the storm.

"A panther or a mountain-lion—I hardly know which," said Fred. "The animal seems to be in the tree above us!"

This was enough to drive the hearts of the quartette into their throats.

What if the terrible beast should drop into the hut, where it could not be seen for the gloom that prevailed there?

The fire by which Watanama had gotten supper had long since become a heap of coals, and afforded a very faint glow, which by no means relieved the darkness.

A minute's stillness followed the cry which had startled every one, and then it was repeated with emphasis.

A hand clutched Fred's arm.

"It is the yellow cat, white boy," said the Shoshone girl.

"I know it now. I recognize him by his screams."

As he spoke, Fighting Fred put up his revolver and drew his knife.

In the gloom the blade would serve him better than the trigger.

"Stand from under the opening in the roof—quick!" he cried to his companions. "That mountain demon is liable to drop among us at any moment. He is in the maple, and the wind may brush him off."

The occupants of the cabin drew back to the wall behind them, where they waited with bated breath for the next event.

They did not have to wait long.

Suddenly, during a terrific gust of wind, a hideous scream was broken atwain, and something alighted in the cabin.

"He is here!" whispered Fred. "We have a visitor for whom we were not looking."

The crisis had arrived.

The Castaways had a foe within the cabin as ferocious as any they could have without.

The stillness which had followed the fall of the panther, which had been shaken from his perch by the violence of the wind, seemed palpable.

It would not be strange if the boys and Watanama heard their own hearts.

The location of the panther was not known, but the four could imagine him crouched a few feet away eying them with two balls of fire, and lashing the air with his yellowish tail.

The arrival of the mountain pest was immediately followed by a lull in the storm, and Fred, in an upward glance through the opening, caught the glimmer of a star.

"I am not going to endure this suspense any longer," he suddenly ejaculated in low tones. "The panther is here and has to be encountered. Now, look out. I'm going to strike a lucifer."

The following moment the crack of a match was heard, then a flame leaped up, and as it grew larger Fred held the little torch above his head.

Watanama was the first to see the visitor.

"See! the yellow cat!" she exclaimed, pointing at an object which the three boys saw at the same moment.

"Heavens! what a monster!" fell from Fred's lips.

Scarcely ten feet from the four was crouched the largest panther they had ever seen.

The burning match seemed to increase his proportions.

His belly touched the puncheons, and his head, furnished with two flashing eyes, rested between his fore-paws, while his hinder parts were raised a little and his long tail moved uneasily back and forth.

It was a sight the young Californians would not soon forget.

"I'll open the battle," resumed Fred, calmly putting up his knife and drawing from his belt a revolver already cocked. "My match will last long enough to afford me good shooting light, still I may not kill. Be ready for an emergency."

"We are all ready," whispered Ned.

It was evident that the panther was about to

leap upon some victim who had been selected from the number before him, and to frustrate him, Fred would have to shoot quick.

Without a tremor the brave boy leveled the revolver and covered the beast, aiming between the glowing eyeballs.

"Now I have him!" he murmured.

At that moment the match, burned through, fell apart, a portion dropping upon the young marksman's hand.

The report of the revolver filled the cabin and was followed by a deafening scream of pain.

"The match did it!" said Fred. "Stand your ground and watch. I have another lucifer."

The second match which the boy struck at that moment blazed up as the other had done, and revealed the panther crouched against the wall of the hut terribly wounded no doubt and on the eve of charging the party.

"Quick! for Heaven's sake give it to him!" shouted Fred.

Ned and Max fired straight at the crouching monster, as, with another growl, he left the puncheons and shot through the air!

The flash of the revolvers disconcerted him and instead of landing on one of the boys, he struck the wall behind them with a dull thud and dropped to the ground.

"You and I for it!" grated Fred Nichols leaping at the panther, knife in hand!

The animal turned upon him and leaped forward with distended jaws, but Fred did not shrink.

He aimed a blow at the demon's side as the match which had fallen from his hand expired on the floor, and as he felt his knife sink beneath the yellow hide, a pair of limbs encircled him and deprived him of his balance.

Boy and panther went to the floor together, the former plying his knife with effect, and the latter replying with scratches and bites.

"Have you a match, Ned?" asked Max.

"Alas! no!" was the answer.

"Never mind the matches, boys," cried Fred's voice. "I'll master the yellow cat if I continue to do as well as I'm doing now!"

Ned, Max and Watanama could hear the terrific struggle going on on the floor, but could not see it.

They kept their weapons in readiness for an emergency, but could not use them in their companion's behalf.

Suddenly there came a thunderous sound from toward the door.

"Hello! in thar?" vociferated a gruff voice. "What kind of a circus ar' you hev'n', anyhow? I'm hyer to tell you boys that the twenty-four hours hev expired, an' thet something's about to happen."

The next moment, Fighting Fred disengaged himself from his four-footed antagonist, and with a bloody knife in his hand staggered, rather than walked, to the door.

"And we are here to tell you, whoever you are, that we don't propose to obey your orders!" he answered in fearless tones. "We've just got rid of one enemy, and haven't any idea of running from another!"

CHAPTER IX.

FOES ON THE ROOF—NED'S MISHAP.

FRED had finished the panther in the nick of time, and while he stood at the door speaking the determined words just recorded, blood streamed down his cheeks; but his eyes lost none of their fighting luster.

Ned had in the mean time lighted a torch, and the interior of the cabin was plainly revealed.

The panther lay on the bloody puncheons a few feet away in the last agonies of death.

A number of gaping wounds inflicted by Fred's knife were visible in the carcass, and there were other evidences of a terrible struggle.

For several minutes after the boy's reply to the loud voice on the outside of the cabin, there was no reply of any kind.

Had the unseen speaker taken his departure, frightened by Fred's words?

If the occupants of the hut could have looked beyond the door, they might have detected the figure of a stalwart man dressed in rough buckskin garments, and armed with rifle and pistols.

This was the person whose voice had startled all.

He stood almost against the door through which he had just sent his warning.

"Them ar' mighty bold words for a boy!" he said suddenly. "We gave you chaps twenty-four hours to leave Grizzly Camp in, but you haven't budged a peg."

"That is true, and, more than that, sir, we do not intend to be frightened away!"

"You don't, eh? We'll be liberal, boys; we don't want to be hard on ye. Thar's enough of us to clean you up."

"Maybe you'd better try that game," flashed Fred.

"Mebbe we will! Look hyer, little chaps, as I hev jes' said, we don't want to be hard on you. What if we should give you till to-morrow night?"

"You can do just as you like," was Fred's response. "Were you to conclude to extend the time a week we might conclude to remain. You need not flatter yourself with the thought that you are unknown. We all know who you are; your voice betrays you, Old Blue."

A light exclamation by the man outside fell upon Fred's ears.

"Since you know so much I'm not going to keep anything back. I am Old Blue Mountain, and Tucson and Captain Snake ain't far off. Do you know who you shot last night?"

"I have an idea."

"Wal, it war Tucson. If the bullet had passed two inches to the right the old feller's life wouldn't be worth a dream to-night; but, as it is, he is goin' to git up ag'in."

"I'm sorry to hear that!" exclaimed Max. "Tell him that for all of us, Fred."

"No," answered Fred in low tones. "That would hardly do," and he turned to the door again.

"Good-by for a while, boys," said Old Blue. "My advice is to git out of Grizzly Camp as soon as possible. It stands in a mighty on-

healthy region jes' now. We ar' liable to come back at any time, an' when we do come something will happen."

Fred's reply was couched in the determined tones he had maintained all along; but no answer was made to it, for Old Blue was walking away.

"I guess we're in for a siege," remarked Ned. "I long for a chance to pay those men for their rascality. Something important has brought them back. They must believe that the cabin stands over or near the mouth of the Lost Mine. What's the matter, Fred?"

Ned's exclamation was caused by seeing his brave young companion stagger from the door and drop like a swooning person to the floor.

The unhurt occupants of the hut sprang to Fred's side, and soon discovered that he had fainted from loss of blood.

His battle with the panther was a desperate one, and now that Old Blue had departed his energies had given way and he was senseless.

An examination of Fred's hurts showed that they were quite serious, but the Indian girl said that there were herbs among the mountains which would soon place the panther-killer on his feet again.

She begged to be allowed to seek them at once, as she said she could find them after night, but Ned and Max refused to let her out.

Fred after awhile was brought back to consciousness, and when Watanama mentioned the herbs to him he told Ned to open the door and let her depart on her mission.

Obedient to Fred's request Ned opened the cabin door, and the girl skipped out into the night.

The storm was now nearly over; the boughs of the maple no longer brushed the cabin roof with the vengeance of a short time before, and there were many stars in the sky.

Fred lay on a cot with his face upturned toward the opening in the roof through which his four-footed enemy had been hurled by the storm.

All at once one of the stars on which he had been gazing intently for some moments faded from sight, and then another, equally brilliant, met the same fate.

"A cloud didn't do that," murmured Fred. "Can there be another panther on the roof?"

Without informing his companions of the singular circumstance the fighting hero of Grizzly Camp resolved to watch awhile longer, or until he could reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Suddenly the two stars reappeared, but for a moment only.

"I'll see what that means," said the wounded boy, noiselessly drawing forth his revolver and cocking it.

"What do you mean?" asked Max, whose sharp ears had caught the click of the lock.

"Hush!" whispered Fred. "Don't bring the light here. Go back to Ned and watch the door. I'm able to take care of myself."

Fred raised the revolver as Max glided back to Ned, who watched near the door.

He was certain that a living object of some kind was on the roof, but whether man or animal he of course did not know.

For a moment after Max's departure he saw the two stars, then they were suddenly blotted from existence.

Fred fired at what he supposed was the living thing.

A wild cry followed the report of the weapon, and a heavy body was heard to roll over the cabin roof and fall to the ground.

"Another panther!" ejaculated Ned.

"A man!" said Max.

There was the glitter of triumph in Fred's eyes.

"Whichever it was, I don't think my bullet went far amiss," was his reply. "I heard the body strike the ground, and my opinion is that it is lying out yonder divested of life. If I were strong enough I'd go out and see for myself."

"I will go," said Ned.

"By the door, Ned?"

"No, through the hole in the roof."

"Not for awhile at least," replied Fred.

"Let us wait a few minutes."

The time mentioned by Fighting Fred soon passed away, and Ned clambered to the opening in the roof where he listened for awhile before he advanced further.

"Everything is quiet down there," he sent back in low tones to his comrades in the hut. "I will go down by means of the tree."

"Use eyes and ears," was Fred's last injunction, and Ned quickly disappeared.

Three minutes later a cry of horror entered the cabin.

Max sprung from the door, and Fred, wounded as he was, almost sprung from the cot.

"Ned has fallen in with a foe," ejaculated Max. "We should have opposed his expedition, Fred."

Max ran to the other side of the hut, and put his lips to a crevice.

"What has happened, Ned?" he cried in loud tones. "If you are alive, speak, for heaven's sake!"

"I am a prisoner," was the startling answer that immediately came back. "Fred shot and killed a Shoshone warrior, and I am in the hands of six braves."

The voice ceased suddenly, as though the speaker had been choked off.

It was terrible news.

In addition to the renegade whites who threatened Grizzly Camp, a party of Shoshone warriors had come to vex it and Ned had fallen into their hands!

A moment's silence followed the awful revelation.

Then Fred's voice rung out.

"Don't despair for a minute, Ned, but keep a stout heart in your breast," he said. "Give the rascally red-skins to understand that if they harm you they'll pay dearly for it. If death does surround us, we are not helpless."

"I'll not despair, boys," was Ned's answer.

"Don't risk your lives on my account. I'll pull through of my own accord if the red-skins will give me time."

Max and Fred watched the opening overhead with cocked revolvers, but no enemy made his appearance.

"Maybe they are satisfied for the present with Ned," said the former.

"It looks that way," was Fred's reply. "We can't do anything for the boy to-night. Watanama may have some news when she comes back."

"Do you think she will return?"

"I do. I place a great deal of confidence in that Indian girl. We'll watch and wait till she comes, Max."

And watch and wait they did till the stars disappeared, and streaks of daylight shot upward from the eastern horizon.

Suddenly a piercing cry greeted their ears and something fell against the door.

"Open, white boys. It is Watanama. Wahtano is at her heels!"

"Heavens!" cried Max, as he flew to the door, and began to remove the barricades.

A moment later he jerked the portal open and the figure of the Star of the Shoshones bounded into the cabin.

"Wahtano! Wahtano!" she cried, in startling accents.

Max closed the door at once, but not until he had caught a glimpse of Watanama's pursuers, the largest grizzly he had ever seen!

He lost no time in readjusting the barricades, and when he had finished his work, he turned upon the red girl who was displaying a bundle of mountain herbs to Fred's gaze.

"Wahtano can't come in now," she said, with a smile. "Him almost catch Watanama in the mountains."

CHAPTER X.

NED IN THE ROLE OF MAZEPPA.

NED's few words recounting his terrible misadventures were only too true.

After mounting to the roof of the cabin, he clambered upon the body of the maple with the assistance of its boughs, and lowered himself to the ground.

He had hardly touched *terra firma* when he was seized from behind, and a moment thereafter he found himself the prisoner of a number of Indians whose half-naked figures he could make out despite the uncertain light.

The Shoshones seemed delighted at the ease with which they had secured a member of the little garrison, and Ned was jerked from man to man during the inspecting process with very little ceremony, and without any regard for his nerves.

It was during this time that in answer to Max's voice he informed his companions of his misfortunes.

Immediately afterward he was knocked almost senseless by one of his captors, who in broken English gave him to understand that he must keep still.

Ned gave the Shoshone a look that meant everlasting hatred, and he was dragged from the scene of his capture, nor halted until the whole band, thirteen in number, reached the banks of Rapid River not far from the noted tree-bridge where we have already witnessed some thrilling scenes.

Here Ned met for the first time the leader of the band, an evil-eyed Shoshone chief who

boasted of the name of Half Moon. Although his figure was stalwart, one of his shoulders was higher than the other, which deformity gave him a singular appearance.

The chief had tried by artificial means to overcome this distortion of his otherwise handsome figure, but it immediately attracted Ned's attention, noticing which Half Moon gave the young captive a blow in the face with the back of his hand which almost deprived him of several of his teeth.

"If I don't get even with you for that, old Reddy, may I never see the boys again," grated Ned under his breath. "That was the act of a brute, and one that a decent Indian would not be guilty of. I'll remember it against you."

After a brief halt on the river-bank, the Shoshones moved away with their captive, keeping the course of the current, and did not halt until the streaks of day again brightened the East.

Then, to the boy's astonishment, a large encampment appeared in sight in a beautiful valley.

"I shall probably see Lean Wolf now," flashed across his mind. "I do not know how the old fellow will regard me, but he ought to treat me with respect since we gave him life when we caught him in the Lost Mine."

The Shoshone camp into which Ned Knight was soon afterward conducted turned out to be the general rendezvous of the large party which, as Lean Wolf had told them, had entered Northern Oregon for the purpose of hunting.

Ned was inclined to believe that the band was as well prepared for war as for hunting, and shortly after entering the camp he had his suppositions confirmed.

"What bring white boys here?" asked Half Moon, when Ned had been placed in the midst of the assembled population of the camp.

"We were going to Fort Okinakane."

"To hunt fur, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where big pale-faces?"

"The three guides, you mean?"

"Yes."

"They're prowling about somewhere. They deserted us like cowards a few nights since."

"Ran off, eh?"

"That's it."

Half Moon reflected for a moment.

"Look hy'er!" he suddenly exclaimed; "white boy, you no business in this country."

Ned's eyes flashed.

"And what business have you here, pray?" he asked, facing the Shoshone resolutely. "You are a long ways from your reservation. Northern Oregon isn't your hunting grounds."

"Mebbe not; but Shoshones come hyer all same," retorted the chief. "If the big chief's warriors want us to go away, why don't they come and chase us off? Half Moon and his young braves hunt wherever the game runs. They don't ask the big white general where to go. White boy, Half Moon is a great red-man. His warriors are strong, an' as numerous as the grass-blades in the valleys. Look at his braves. These are but a few of them. White boy, you no business hyer."

The manner of the chief was insolent in the extreme.

Ned saw that all the Indians were in complete accord with him, and their lowering looks did not speak well for his welfare.

"How much country has white boy seen?" suddenly resumed the chief.

"Not a great deal."

"Half moon show him more. Bring in one of the swift horses."

A shudder went to the young Californian's heart.

"Are the heartless wretches going to make a Mazeppa out of me?" he involuntarily asked himself. "They are mean enough to stoop to anything. I have yet to hear of a Shoshone with a heart."

The chief's order concerning the horse was quickly obeyed, and Ned soon found himself within a few feet of a beautiful roan three-year-old, whose limbs were symmetry itself.

"Horse never been rode yet, white boy," said Half Moon while Ned gazed intently at the steed. "Him kin run to the place where the sun sets an' not git tired. How boy like to ride him, eh?"

"I am in your power," said Ned. "I expect to be bound to that horse and sent adrift. It is the punishment I expect at your hands, but if I outlive the torture, I will try to pay you back."

The youth's words were addressed to Half Moon whose reply was a malicious grin and a moment later in merciless tones he gave orders for the boy to be lashed to the back of the unbroken horse.

Thongs for that purpose were speedily forthcoming, and more than twenty savages sprung forward to carry out the chief's commands.

While two strong bucks held the horse, Ned was carried forward and thrown upon his back, with his head toward and almost against the mane.

The young trapper did not struggle for he knew that resistance would only tighten the cords, and render escape next to impossible.

The process of tying Ned to the horse occupied fifteen minutes, for the animal was restless and did not take kindly to his burden.

Among those who were foremost in performing this merciless task were several boys not past Ned's own age.

They seemed to take great delight in what they did, showing Ned no more kindness than did their older brethren.

Although Ned had not been deprived of his clothes, the cords hurt him very much, and he knew that the rapid speed of the horse would only increase his pain.

Suddenly all the Indians stepped back but two, and they were the ones who held the steed.

Ned held his breath; he knew the crisis had come.

"White boy, keep your heart up," said a low voice at Ned's ear; it spoke in rapid tones. "Young horse go a long ways, mebbe. When he gets tired say hoo! hoo! hoo! in his ear. I am Nagamo, the white boy's friend. My hands have tied the knot for him."

Need we say that Ned started?

Could it be that in the Shoshone camp at the critical moment he had found a friend?

"Nagamo!" he repeated. "I will not forget the name."

He had not time to say more, for a loud cry pealed from Half Moon's throat, and the Indians who held the horse sprung aside.

The animal gathered himself for a moment, and then with a snort went off like a rocket to the wild yells of the assembled camp.

"Fortune help me!" ejaculated Ned, as he felt himself being borne forward at terrible speed. "This is what a fellow gets for wanting to become a trapper in earnest. Shout on, you red fiends! You may yet pay dearly for this morning's work."

The yells of the Shoshones still rung in the boy's ears; but the speed of the horse caused them to grow fainter and fainter as he left the wild landscape behind.

Trees, rocks and bushes disappeared at a glance, and the horse presently exchanged the valley for the roughness of the mountains.

Would he never stop, nor even check his speed?

Not until he showed signs of fatigue after a journey that threatened to be endless, did Ned's hopes rise.

Then he thought of Nagamo's words, and placing his lips as close to the animal's ear as he could, he shouted "hoo! hoo! hoo!" in a loud voice.

The effect was magical; the horse braced his fore-feet in the wild trail and instantly became stock-still.

Ned shouted for joy.

CHAPTER XI.

NED FINDS A FRIEND AND A WEAPON.

"PLEASE fortune, I will yet live to pay Half Moon back," was Ned's first ejaculation when he realized that the Indian steed had stopped, after a long run which had extended over many miles.

But the boy could scarcely move for the ropes that bound him to the horse's back.

The long journey, while it had by no means exhausted the animal's powers, had fatigued him somewhat, and he was glad to crop the rich grass that grew alongside the trail, and to regain his breath among the mountains.

Ned was eager to sit astride of his prize, and to be able to guide him, if possible, to the cabin where he left Max and Fred.

He tugged at the cords with a great deal of perseverance, and several times found himself on the eve of despairing.

If Nagamo had "fixed" the knots for Ned, he had certainly done so in a manner not at all to his liking.

Great drops of sweat came out on the white boy's forehead as he tugged away at the cords; he worked with a spirit that almost commanded success.

It was not until he had spent an hour in earnest work that he was able to move further than a few inches.

He hailed his success with an exclamation of joy.

After freeing one hand, the remainder of the task was not very difficult, and Ned at last sat

astride of the horse and formed out of the ropes a strong, if not a beautiful bridle.

"Now, where am I?" he asked, surveying the rough scenery by which he was hemmed in. "I have escaped from the fate designed for me by the Shoshones; but I must be far from Grizzly Camp, and in a region entirely unknown to white men."

The boy's situation was not at all inviting. He longed to go back to the old camp and to surprise his companions with his safe return.

He had been torn from them at the most critical moment of their sojourn in the northern wilderness, and now he wanted to rejoin them to help defend the camp against the wiles of Old Blue Mountain and his partners.

The sun was mounting toward the meridian while Ned tried to get his bearings.

The Indians had stripped him of everything valuable, his revolver, knife and compass, thus rendering him entirely helpless in the wild land.

After awhile Ned decided to urge the horse on, hoping that he might strike the trail leading to Grizzly Camp, or encounter some landmark that would tell him where he was.

He was delighted to find that the horse obeyed him in every particular, and before a great while he was several miles from the place where he had freed himself, but still in a strange region.

"There doesn't seem to be much hope for me," he said, with a smile. "If I had a gun I might procure a dinner, but I recollect that my rifle was left at the cabin."

Hoping against hope, almost, that something favorable would turn up, Ned pressed on deeper and deeper into the heart of the wild mountain range.

All at once his horse stopped, threw up his head and started back with a snort of affright.

"A grizzly, I guess," said Ned, trying to control the steed, which threatened to break from his power.

"Ho! ho! ho!" rung out loud and clear the next moment, till the mountains rung with the echoes.

"That's no bear!" ejaculated the boy, although the next moment he saw what appeared to be the head and shoulders of a grizzly.

These were sticking out of the mouth of a cavern on the trail side about ten rods ahead, and made up the apparition that had frightened the horse.

"Ain't I a bear?" followed the lost boy's last words. "Look at my head, ho! ho! ho!" and the words echoed more devilishly than before.

To say that Ned was surprised does not tell the story.

His horse still manifested emotions of terror, but the boy now had him under control, while he stared at the strange being at the cave.

"Who are you?" he suddenly asked. "You look like a grizzly, but you don't laugh like one—that's certain."

"Ho! ho! I think not," was the response, and the following instant there leaped from the cave the misshapen figure of a human being—in short a dwarf, whose likeness it was next to impossible to describe.

It came hopping down the trail toward Ned, much after the manner of a frog, with a queer grin overspreading its countenance.

The bear-skin head and all had been left behind, for in the twinkling of an eye the grizzly had transformed himself into a human dwarf.

The color of the dwarf's skin was that of parchment, and a pair of little eyes overshadowed by long lashes peeped forth with a half-crazy twinkle.

The dirty buckskin garments, with which the dwarf had clothed himself, scarcely sufficed to hide his ungainly figure.

He did not stop until he stood in the trail beside Ned's horse, the top of his head barely reaching to the animal's flanks.

"Don't you see I'm no grizzly?" asked the dwarf.

"Of course I do; but who are you?"

"Poto."

"Poto? Well, Poto, will you please tell me where I am?"

"White boy doesn't know then?"

"If I did I should not have asked you."

"Lost from the cabin, hey?"

Ned felt his heart bound for joy.

"Yes, I am lost from the cabin; in other words, from Grizzly Camp," he replied. "Am I near the old place?"

Instead of replying, the mountain dwarf burst into a boisterous laugh.

Ned bit his lip.

"I don't want a laugh, Poto," he said sternly.

"What I do want, though, is information. I now believe that this Indian horse has carried me near the old camp, but I am afraid that I could not find it without help. My comrades there may be in peril and may need my help. Will you show me the trail that leads to Grizzly Camp?"

"Poto will show white boy."

"Good! I thought you would!" cried Ned.

After eying the young Californian for a moment longer, the dwarf turned and hopped toward his cave.

"I suppose he means that I shall follow him," murmured Ned, urging the horse forward.

To this the dwarf made no objection, but when Ned reached the mouth of the cavern he had disappeared.

The den was a queer place for an abode; it looked like the lair of a wild beast, and the lost boy did not desire to explore its depths.

He drew rein in front of it, and waited for the dwarf to come forth.

At the end of five minutes the dwarfish creature hopped into view, and his skinny hands held up to Ned an old rifle such as the early explorers of the West used many years ago.

"White boy may have use for gun; take it," said Poto, and Ned bent down and accepted the gift with an expression of thanks.

He smiled to himself as he examined the old piece.

It had not to all appearances been fired in twenty years, and he even doubted whether it contained a load.

Still he accepted it, not wishing to displease the dwarf, on whom so much now depended, and evinced a desire to be conducted to the cabin wherever it was.

"Poto will show white boy but," said the little ogre, and away he went down the trail, paying not the least attention to Ned's proffer of a seat on the saddle.

For several minutes Ned followed the dwarf without speaking, and all at once Poto began to ascend the mountain by a path scarcely wide enough to admit of the passage of a horse.

Every once in awhile he would look back to see if he was followed, and finding Ned at his heels, he would evince his approval in a grin.

At last, at a height of several hundred feet above the level of the trail, Poto halted and turned to Ned with a look of triumph.

"He must see the old shanty!" exclaimed the white boy trapped, and throwing himself from the horse, for the trail had become very steep, he hurried forward.

"See!" cried Poto, stretching forth one of his queer-looking arms. "Does not white boy see the cabin he has been looking for?"

Ned followed the dwarf's hand and saw a goodly distance below them a hut, beside which grew a tree that instantly reminded him of the scenes he had left behind.

He could hardly suppress a cry of gladness.

"Poto, if I had a gold mine it should be yours!" he cried, turning to the dwarf.

"One near here, mebbe."

Ned started.

Did the dwarf know anything about the Lost Mine whose mouth was concealed by the capitol of Grizzly Camp?

"Go down to the cabin," resumed Poto. "The Indian horse has brought white boy almost home. Let him be careful when he nears the hut, for the bad pale-face is not far away."

"I understand, Poto. You mean the three white rascals who left us to our fate a few nights since, Ah! they had better not cross my path."

"Gun shoot 'em, eh?" cried Poto tapping the old musket.

"I would see what it could do. I hope we will meet again, Poto. You have done me a valuable service, and I long to repay you. How can I help you?"

"Poto want no help," said the mountain dwarf, shaking his head. "Him go back to his cave and live like a grizzly, hol hol hol!" And before Ned could restrain him, he had passed beyond arm's reach.

"Take the horse for your trouble," cried Ned after him, and to a purpose, too, for the dwarf leaped upon the steed's back and wheeling him suddenly, dashed down the mountain at break-neck speed.

Ned did not tarry long on the spot from which the dwarf had shown Grizzly Camp.

Despite his capture by the Shoshones, fortune had favored him in a very strange manner, and he felt his indebtedness to the singular being whom accident had thrown into his path.

An easily-discerned trail led down the mountain toward the camp and Ned availed himself of it.

After a tramp of many minutes he heard the roar of the waters of Rapid River as they rushed through their narrow channel.

It was music to his ears now.

"I am getting near home," he exclaimed. "The boys will be delighted to welcome me, and—"

He stopped suddenly and raised the old gun to his shoulder.

A man dressed in dirty buckskin had risen before him.

"Halt, thar, youngster, an' drop thet gun," cried the man.

"It is Captain Snake, one of the villainous three," muttered Ned. "Stand back!" he called aloud. "My hand is at the trigger."

"You daren't shoot me," was the answer, as the speaker advanced. "Why, I'm Old Snake, boy—"

The sentence was broken by the thunderous report of the old musket, and the man in front of Ned threw up his hands and disappeared.

Ned wheeled and ran toward the cabin.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHOSHONES COME BACK.

"By the smile of Fortune! here comes Ned!"

"It cannot be, Max!"

"He is here, running as though he had a thousand Shoshones at his heels!"

Max was at the door tearing down the barricades as rapidly as possible.

Watanama the Indian girl was assisting him.

When the last one had been removed, the boy opened the door and Ned, almost out of breath and still bearing the old musket, dashed into the cabin.

"This is what I call good luck!" he exclaimed, seeing himself in the midst of his companions once more. "We are united again, thank heaven! Our three betrayers have not left the neighborhood. The chances are that I have settled with Captain Snake for his treachery."

"What! killed him, Ned?"

"I do not know but that I have. My gun went off while it was pointed at his head."

"Where was he?"

"A short distance from here, and near the river. After firing I ran for the cabin. How do you feel, Fred?"

"Better. Watanama is indeed an angel of health. I already feel the results of her doctoring. But tell us about your adventures. I know you have a yarn to spin, Ned."

Ned Knight forthwith proceeded to give an account of his adventures since his forcible removal from Grizzly Camp. His audience was small but none the less attentive, and he was listened to to the close without once being interrupted.

"Watanama also had a narrow escape," smiled Fred when the young narrator had concluded. "She was chased almost to the door of the cabin by a grizzly into whose body Max fired two shots from his Winchester; but Old Eph succeeded in getting away."

"If it had not been for the presence of enemies in the neighborhood the old fellow would have been followed and bagged. He lumbered off with a good deal of difficulty, and is not far away at this time."

"There, Max," said Fred gently. "Don't

set your head on obtaining that bear-skin for the present. The time may come when an opportunity for getting it may present itself, but just now Grizzly Camp is in a state of siege, and we must do nothing that will imperil our safety."

These were wholesome words and cooled Max's ardor.

Constant watching at the loop holes of the cabin failed to reveal the immediate presence of any foe, and the sun began to drop toward the western horizon.

During Ned's brief captivity the hole in the roof of the hut had been repaired, and the carcass of the panther buried under the floor.

Fred said that, thanks to the herbs found by Watanama in the mountain, he expected to be on his feet again in a couple of days, and every now and then declared it his intention to defend the camp to the last extremity.

The red girl was entirely satisfied with her lot, and frequently told the boys that she had abandoned her tribe forever.

"They don't seem very anxious to give us another tilt," remarked Max as the sun went down, leaving him at his favorite post, rifle in hand. "With Tucson Tom badly wounded and Captain Snake probably dead, Old Blue does not feel like pushing hostilities."

"I think I would not if I stood in his shoes," laughed Ned; "but there is no telling what the coming night will bring forth."

Ah! that was true.

If the little garrison of Grizzly Camp could have pierced the evening shadows that lay between them and the river, they might have beheld a very interesting council of war.

Among the bushes not far from the rapid stream crouched three men whose faces were by no means handsome.

One had the appearance of being badly hurt, another had his head bandaged by a crimson rag, while the third, the most villainous looking member of the trio, was talking in mad tones.

"The next time I guess they'll bullet me," he growled; "that is, boys, if we let them have their own way. If we don't finish the job an' git possession of the shanty, the Injuns will do it for us, an' then good-by to the gold mine under it. I'm in for doin' the whole business up to-night an' doin' it up brown, too. One of the kids bored you through an' through, Tucson, an' we don't expect you to have a hand in the fun, but you, cap'n, you've got a scalp wound, an' you can work."

"I'm ready for anything," replied the man last spoken to who looked like a half-breed. "Ned aimed to kill an' it isn't his fault that he did not. You can stay hyer, Tucson, an' rest yourself. Old Blue an' I will do the job to-night."

"I'll stay hyer, but I'd rather be with you," replied the badly-wounded desperado. "My opinion is that you'll find the camp on the alert, so be keerful, for the boys can shoot."

"We've tackled men before now, Tucson, an' we ought to be able to take keer of three boys."

"An' an Injun gal?"

"Yes, an' an Injun gal."

Night had fairly thrown her mantle over the earth when the council among the bushes broke

up, and the man called Tucson Tom was the sole person left on the spot.

Old Blue and Captain Snake, the half-breed, crawled toward the cabin.

The night promised to favor their murderous undertaking, for with the disappearance of the sun heavy clouds rose above the horizon, and threatened to obscure the disk of the moon when it should rise.

Did the boys see the figure that crept toward the cabin from the southwest?

Not far behind it was another moving over the ground in the same manner, and heading toward the same goal.

When the crawlers halted they were almost against the cabin, and putting their heads together conversed for a while in low whispers.

Suddenly one of the pair turned his head and listened toward the point from which they had crept.

"What is it, cap'n?" he said addressing his companion.

"I can't make out yet, but something's comin' this way."

"Mebbe it's a b'ar?"

"Or an Injun?"

"Not a red-skin, I hope."

"They're liable to come back, you know, Blue."

"That's a fact, cap'n. Can't you see any thing of it yet?"

"Nothin'."

For a moment longer Captain Snake, the half-breed, listened and looked with every sense on the alert.

"I see it now!" he suddenly whispered at his companion's ear.

"Wal, what is it?"

"An Injun, by hokey!"

Old Blue Mountain drew his bowie.

"Is the crittur comin' toward us?" he asked.

"Straight for us, or I'm a catamount," answered the captain.

"We've got to settle him, that's all. Lie low an' let him come on. He'll never get to the cabin, for I hold a settler in my hand."

The night was not dark enough to hide entirely the figure that was wending its way over the ground toward the two men prepared to give the creeper a warm reception.

Old Blue did not take his eyes from it for a moment.

"Finish him the first blow," said the half-breed. "Don't let him get a yell on us. If he does, Blue, the jig is up for to-night."

"I know that, cap'n. It'll surprise you presently to see how easy an Injun can die."

Another minute sufficed to bring the two parties almost together.

The destination of the red-skin, whoever he was, undoubtedly was the cabin.

Perhaps he was the spy of a large body of savages not far off; if so, it was essential that Old Blue should put a summary end to his present expedition.

All at once the white desperado sprung at the creeping figure, and as it leaped up his hand darted at the Indian's throat.

"You die hyer!" hissed Old Blue, in the astonished red-skin's ears. "The cap'n an' I don't allow anybody to interfere in our game."

Down came the uplifted knife, and Old Blue cowered to the ground a human body in which life was already extinct.

"Did I fail, cap'n?" he inquired, in low, triumphant tones, and then added. "I never do, when my hand's in workin' condition, as it is to-night."

Captain Snake eyed the dead brave around whose neck was a necklace of wolf-teeth, and turned away a moment later with a smile of satisfaction.

"Now let us go on," said Old Blue. "I'm sure that the youngsters didn't hear any noise for I made none. Thet Injun's name war Lean Wolf."

He turned toward the cabin as he finished, but before he had proceeded a rod, the hand of Captain Snake fell on his shoulder.

"Halt!"

"What's up now—another Injun?"

"More than one I'm thinkin'."

"No, cap'n!"

"Look yonder, an' yonder. If them things ain't red-skins I never saw stumps crawl before."

Captain Snake's moving hand showed Old Blue the objects his keen vision had detected.

"Injuns they are, curse the luck!" grated the desperado. "See! they are getting together. Thar! they're all grouped now."

The two worthies of the far Northwest gazed speechless at the movement that they had just witnessed.

Captain Snake had counted twenty Indians, and his companion had doubtless done the same.

"Thar they go!" suddenly ejaculated Old Blue, as the red-skins darted toward the cabin.

The next minute the flashes of four rifles cut the night, and the clear reports floated up the mountain sides.

"The young badgers weren't asleep by any means!" said Captain Snake. "Some of their bullets told, for the red-skins gave several death-yells. Thar 'll be high fun now!"

The air now resounded with the wild yells of the Indians who knew that longer secrecy was not possible, and having recoiled a few feet from the deadly fire of the defenders of the camp, they suddenly recovered and rushed forward again.

But they were again met by the deadly rifles on the inside, and several more dropped dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMPTY HUT—HIT FROM ABOVE.

THE effective shooting of the defenders of Grizzly Camp seemed to daze the attacking party.

The red-skins reeled from the flashes of the guns, and for a moment seemed on the point of retiring altogether from the field.

A stalwart chief, however, animated them by his fearless spirit and led them on.

As if to assist the besieged, the clouds broke suddenly above the hut and let a flood of moonlight down upon the scene.

"Hurrah! now pour it into them!" exclaimed Fred. "Let us show them that we are not to be captured with ease."

Despite the rapid shots a portion of the red band reached the hut against whose logs they were comparatively safe.

"They 'll try the door next," said Max, and sure enough it was struck blow after blow, and threatened with destruction.

But the planks were strong, and the boys confident that they would be able to withstand the attack.

As the Shoshones had now concentrated all their efforts on the door, the besieged turned to the menaced quarter and awaited results.

What had become of Old Blue Mountain and Captain Snake?

They were no longer on the spot where we saw them last, for dismayed by the red-skins' furious attack, they had beaten a hasty retreat, sneaking from the field back to the place where they had left Tucson Tom their wounded companion.

To their horror they did not find Tucson there, and in low voices they called him, but received no response.

A brief search, however, revealed the missing man, but what a sight he was when found.

Tucson Tom had had a desperate encounter with a grizzly from the look of the undergrowth by which the desperado was surrounded. The animal was doubtless the same one wounded by Max a few hours before.

Tucson Tom had fought for life, but the grizzly had conquered, for the dead body of the lawless fellow, terribly torn, was the spectacle that greeted Old Blue and Captain Snake.

The two men stood silently over the mangled corpse for a few moments, when Old Blue suddenly exclaimed:

"Thar's that much more for us, cap'n, when we git the bonanza. Tucson would never have amounted to much with that wound in the back, but if I could find the grizzly what won the game I'd pay him back for his work."

As if in answer to Old Blue's boast a fierce growl and a noise at his left startled both men, and they whirled in a moment.

"The old fiend as I'm a sinner!" ejaculated Old Blue. "Stand whar you ar' jess one minute, an' you'll never finish another pard."

Out flew Old Blue's revolver as he took a mad stride toward the grizzly by whom they had just been confronted.

"Stop! none o' that!" cried Captain Snake, springing forward and laying his hand on his arm. "A shot may bring the whole red gang down upon us, an' you know we don't want 'em hyer. If you must fight the grizzly do it with your knife."

"I will, cap'n!"

Back to the speaker's belt went the cocked revolver and out leaped a knife.

Old Blue was no coward.

The grizzly, doubtless badly wounded from his repeated growls, stood his ground and awaited the onset.

Suddenly he rose on his hinder feet to receive Old Blue, who threw out his left arm as he sprung forward.

A moment later he sunk into the grizzly's embrace.

Three times he struck in rapid succession, at

each blow the knife sinking beneath the bear's shaggy coat, and the huge monster suddenly staggered back to receive the knife of Captain Snake, who had come up.

In less than five minutes after the finding of Tucson Tom's mangled body he had been avenged.

Old Blue and his companions picked up the corpse and carried it to a secluded spot, where they buried it in the best manner they could, but shed no tears over the grave.

Like all men of their class they seldom wept. "I'd like to know how things ar' progressin' at the camp," said Old Blue. "I don't hear any noise that way. Mebbe the Injuns have carried the place by storm an' paved the way for us."

"Hadn't we better go an' see?"

"I think we had."

Side by side the two men glided toward the besieged cabin, but halted a number of rods from it and strained their eyes to see what was going on.

Strange to say they saw no Indians and heard no sounds.

"Isn't the door standing wide open?" suddenly asked Captain Snake.

"Hang me if it isn't!" was the reply. "The red-skins have taken the place, an' carried off the kids. Come on, cap'n. I'm anxious to get at the bottom of this affair."

It was indeed true that the cabin door stood wide open; Old Blue's eyes had not deceived him.

Satisfied that the Shoshones had taken captives the occupants of Grizzly Camp, the two men hurried forward, and Old Blue was the first to halt on the threshold of the cabin.

It was empty!

"I'll have a light in an instant," said Old Blue, and drawing a lucifer from the depths of a buckskin pocket he produced a blaze, with which he proceeded to illumine the interior of the hut.

"They've gone, that's a fact," he said after a minute's inspection. "Now I'm goin' to see if I have been right. Take up that board there, cap'n."

Captain Snake removed the puncheon designated by Old Blue's finger, and looked up with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"Thar's no hole hyer," he said. "We must be wrong, after all."

Old Blue looked astonished.

"I'm not goin' to give it up yet," he replied: "Take up the other board. What do you see now?"

"Nothin' but earth."

"No hole, cap'n!"

"No hole, Blue."

"Hang me if I ain't stumped!"

"So am I."

Old Blue's match went out at that moment, and the interior of the cabin was in darkness again.

"Can it be possible that this old hut does not stand over the opening of the Lost Mine?" the gold-hunter exclaimed. "I do not want to believe it, but I'm afraid I will have to. I tell you what we'll do, cap'n. We'll set fire to the shanty that has fooled us. I don't want to give

the missing mine up yet. It's in this country somewhar, an' wharever it is thar lies our fortune. I've got another match."

"Thar's nothin' in hyer to start a fire with."

"Thar's kindlin' outside."

The two worthies left the cabin with the full determination of giving it over to the flames.

The ground around the hut was covered in many places with pine cones and dry boughs, which would burn readily.

The moonlight showed the two men where to work.

They soon collected a lot of combustible material, which Old Blue threw into the cabin, and got ready to fire it.

The two scamps never dreamed that they were watched.

If they could have observed a certain place on one of the largest trees near by, and elevated about sixty feet above the ground, they would have seen one-half of a human figure.

"I'll see what I can do for you, Old Blue!" exclaimed the boy who was leaning from the hole in the mountain monarch. "I used to throw the hatchet pretty accurately in the California camps, but my arm is still sore from my panther-fight, and I may miss my mark. However, here it goes, with the compliments of the boys of Grizzly Camp."

The next instant the youth so strangely situated sent a hatchet whirling through the air, well-aimed at one of the dim figures before the cabin.

A startling cry followed the throw, and Old Blue, in the act of striking another match before the door, sprung to his feet, to stagger back like a person hard hit.

"Who did that?" he growled, as he quickly recovered. "Cap'n, that lick came from the skies."

"I don't know about that; but it came from above—I know that," was the response. "We must go back, Old Blue. Hang me if I stay hyer another minute!"

Captain Snake turned and quitted the scene, and, as Old Blue followed him, a boy's triumphant laugh soared toward the stars.

"It was a good throw after all," he said. "It saved the cabin and, I trust, marked Old Blue for life."

CHAPTER XIV.

HUNTING AGAIN—A FLYING SHOT.

A MORE surprised lot of Indians than those that rushed into the cabin after breaking the door down was probably never seen in the wild Northwest.

They expected to find the defenders of the camp completely at their mercy; but instead they found the cabin empty, and not a white boy for them to wreak their vengeance on.

If they had lifted several of the heavy punchons that helped to form the rough floor of the hut, they might have solved the mystery of the boys' escape; but as they did not, and withdrew from the cabin with a good deal of confusion, they left the conundrum unsolved.

The three boys and Watanama, the Shoshone girl, had effected their escape by means of the

old passage leading to the cave beneath the cabin.

The reader will recollect that on another occasion a large quantity of earth fell from the roof of the corridor, imprisoning the boys in the gold-room, and forcing them to escape by the tree and Lean Wolf's seventy-foot rope.

A short time prior to the forcing of the door of the cabin by the Shoshones, Max discovered that the dirt in settling down had left a small opening, which led to the cave itself.

If it could be enlarged, escape were possible!

An effort to widen it encountered success, and, in short, when the door fell in the Castaways of Grizzly Camp were safely housed in the corridor.

The retreat of the Indians was swiftly followed by the arrival at the hut of Old Blue and Captain Snake, after which followed the incidents already described.

There was a general laugh of triumph when Fred descended from the tree and related the story of the hatchet cast.

Despite his wounds, Fighting Fred had made his way up the old tree, and, by a lucky blow, had saved the camp from destruction by fire.

"We'll have a little rest now, I'm thinking," he said. "The Indians have withdrawn full of superstitious notions concerning our escape, and Old Blue and the captain have retired rather discomfited. We have reason to rejoice, for we are still alive, and Grizzly Camp not much damaged."

We might add here that Fred's views were correct ones.

For several days nothing occurred to imperil the camp, and Watanama had said that the red hunting-party had doubtless retired to another part of the country.

Fred's wounds healed rapidly, and at the end of the week the cabin was tenanted again by the whole party, and not the face of a single foe was in sight.

As Lean Wolf had not made his appearance, the boys were inclined to believe that he had fallen in the assault on the hut which was not the case, as we know.

As the boy trappers possessed good appetites, the bear-meat disappeared rapidly during the week of siege and excitement, and the obtaining of a fresh supply was necessary.

Ned also desired to visit Poto, the dwarf, who had rendered such valuable assistance to him during his escape from the Shoshones.

It was agreed one day that Max should guard the camp while Fred, Ned and Watanama undertook a reconnoissance as well as a hunt for meat.

Ned asked the Indian girl if she knew anything about Poto, but as no very satisfactory answer was returned, he did not press the matter, although he believed that the dwarf was not wholly unknown to her.

On leaving camp Watanama asked permission to guide the party, which was readily granted, and, bidding Max adieu, the hunters set out on the hunt.

The Star of the Shoshones led the boys with a confidence which told them that she was not unfamiliar with the country, and when Fred asked

her if she had ever seen it before she cast down her eyes and did not reply.

"She is going straight to Poto's cave—I am sure of it!" suddenly exclaimed Ned. "I recognize several landmarks on this trail. We shall see the dwarf before long, Fred."

"If he is at home," smiled the panther-killer.

Two miles further on the girl guide suddenly stopped and turned upon the boys.

"I knew it!" said Ned. "You have guided us to within sight of the dwarf's den."

"It is down yonder, around the big bare rock," was the reply.

"I know it. Let us go on and see the strange little fellow."

The Indian girl advanced again, but with a good deal of reluctance.

Ned grew impatient.

"I will lead the way," he cried. "I want to get along faster than this," and, springing ahead of Watanama, he led the way eagerly down the side of the mountain.

A few minutes' haste brought him to the big bare boulder that jutted over the trail, and as he turned it he uttered a loud cry and instantly recoiled.

Fred and Watanama sprung forward.

"Look! yonder is Poto!" exclaimed Ned. "Woe to the miscreants who did that deed!"

The sight that met the beholders' eyes was horrible enough to chill their blood.

A human body, deformed, it is true, but still human, was swaying in the wind before a dark cavernous opening that led into the bowels of the earth!

At first sight the three startled ones knew that it was Poto.

"He may not be dead!" suddenly cried Fred, dashing forward, and the following minute he had cut the dwarf down."

"Is he dead?" eagerly queried Ned, leaning forward.

"Dead and cold!" was the reply.

"I wonder who did it?"

"Can't you guess, Ned?"

"I can, indeed," was the reply. "Old Blue and Captain Snake had to wreak their vengeance on some living object, and they chose this poor being! I owed Poto a great deal, almost life itself, and now I find him dangling in the air—dead! It is terrible! Show me the trail of the murderers!"

"Not so fast," said Fred, who could smother his ire. "We cannot afford to turn vengeance-hunters yet. Our day may come. We will bury Poto in the depths of his den, where the wolves will not find him, and then prosecute our hunt for meat."

The body of the dwarf was carried beyond the threshold of the cave where he had spent many years of his life, and placed in a grave over which stones were piled for his monument.

There was nothing in the cavern to tempt the trio, and when they left nothing was taken away.

They believed that the dwarf had met his death at the hands of Old Blue and Captain Snake, who had probably left the country for a time, if not for good.

Who ever did it did a mean act, which called

loudly for vengeance, for Watanama said, in one of her communicative moods, that Poto had never been known to harm a living creature.

Having found the mountain dwarf and given him decent burial, the little party started off on another trail.

"Will we find game in this direction?" asked Fred, addressing the Shoshone girl.

"Mebbe so," was the unsatisfactory reply, which Fred swallowed with a good deal of ill-grace.

All at once Watanama stopped and pointed almost straight ahead.

"Which of the white boys is the best shot?" she inquired, with a smile.

"Fred is," Ned quickly replied. "What is to be shot at? I see nothing."

"But I do," said Fred, stepping forward and raising his rifle. "I see the biggest pair of buck-horns in Oregon."

"Don't you see the buck himself, Fred?"

"Nothing but the horns; but I've got a good idea where the head is."

"Then let him have it."

Fred's cheek had already dropped to the stock of the rifle, and he was aiming at a certain spot just below the elegant pair of antlers, which were raised above some bushes sixty yards away.

But ere he pressed the trigger the clear report of a rifle further up the mountain broke the stillness, and the buck disclosed his whole form by springing into the air.

Fred lowered his rifle amazed.

"Who fired that shot?" he exclaimed. "In another second the deer would have been mine."

"Hurrah! The biggest buck in Oregon!" shouted a loud voice, and the next moment the figure of a man rushed toward the deer, which was writhing on the ground in the agonies of death.

"Don't you know that man?" exclaimed Ned, laying his hand on Fighting Fred's arm. "It is Captain Snake. Let us capture the villain and deal with him as he deserves."

"Old Blue may not be far away."

"What of it! I'll cover the villain yonder."

Ned's rifle went to his shoulder as he stepped forward.

"Hello there, captain!" he called in a loud tone, and with an oath the man, who was in the act of bleeding the deer, sprung up and grasped his gun.

"Don't make any demonstrations, captain," continued Ned over his rifle. "We want to talk to you a little. Stay where you are!"

Captain Snake, the half-breed, was too astonished to reply.

He saw that he was at the mercy of those who had a right to send a bullet through his brain, and he evidently thought that submission was the best thing he could do.

Therefore, he did not lift his gun, but held up his hands in token of surrender, and his captors moved forward.

"That's a splendid buck, captain," said Fred, glancing at the dead deer as he came up. "You were a little too quick for me."

"I'm that way for nearly everybody," snapped the captain.

"You were for Poto, as we have just seen," put in Ned. "That was a mean act."

Captain Snake's eyes flashed, but he did not reply.

"What made you hang the dwarf?" continued Ned.

"None o' your business, white boy!" was the mad response, as Captain Snake leaped like a tiger at Ned.

The young Californian instantly raised his rifle, but it was wrenched from his hands, and the next instant he was borne away by the stalwart half-breed, who was running down the trail at the top of his speed!

"Help! murder! h-e-l-p!" rung instinctively from Ned's throat.

Fred stood dazed for a moment.

He had not looked for such a turn of affairs.

When he recovered, Captain Snake and his prisoner were rapidly disappearing.

"Watanama will stop him!" cried the Indian girl, throwing her rifle to her shoulder.

"No! you'll hit Ned!" gasped Fred.

"Watanama can shoot, white boy!"

The Star of the Shoshones sprung from Fred's grasp, and fired a shot after Captain Snake.

"What did Watanama say?" she exclaimed, wheeling upon Fred with a triumphant expression as the smoke of the gun soared upward.

Fred did not reply.

He was staring down the trail, where the half-breed and his captive had disappeared with the crack of the rifle.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MAX ENTERTAINED VISITORS.

WE are now going back to Max—unobtrusive, cautious Max.

He had been left in charge of Grizzly Camp before, but had not enjoyed any adventures during his stay "on guard."

This time, however, he was not to get off so easily.

For an hour after the departure of his companions, Max stood at the largest of the loop-holes—quite a little window of itself—and surveyed the landscape that stretched toward the river.

Fred cautioned him not to unbar the door on any account, but this admonition was not needed; for Max never did anything without having first revolved it in his brain, and he was not likely to be cajoled into opening the door.

There was a certain loneliness about his situation, but the boy did not mind it, and he anxiously awaited the hunting-party's return.

Suddenly there appeared in front of the cabin and not more than ten feet beyond the door the huge head of a bear.

With the most quizzical expression imaginable Old Ephraim was surveying the cabin, and Max fancied that the hoggish little eyes had singled him out.

"I'll surprise you!" ejaculated the boy, springing back for the rifle that stood in the nearest corner. "Who knows but that I may bag the most game by remaining at home?"

He returned to the loop-hole a minute after-

ward, but the bear had quietly taken his departure.

"Went off without saying adieu," laughed the boy, who regretted that he had missed an excellent shot by having his rifle in the corner and not in his hands.

The word had scarcely left his lips when a strange scratching noise carried him to the back part of the hut.

"Bless me, if the old fellow isn't going up the maple!" he said, after a moment's listening. "If he tries the roof he'll come through a great deal quicker than Fred's panther did, and I will be in a pretty situation."

Max thought of the avenue leading to the underground apartments, but to his courage, let it be said, he never thought of running from the bear.

From what he saw of the animal he believed it to be a grizzly not yet full grown, but large enough to give him a terrible battle, and of sufficient weight to crash through the cabin's roof.

It was a very unpleasant moment in Max's life.

He heard the bear making his way up the tree that grew almost against the hut, and followed his movements by the noises.

Suddenly the sounds ceased; Bruin had reached the first fork from whence he could step upon the roof if that was his intention.

Max stood in one corner of the cabin with cocked rifle and his eyes fixed on that part of the ceiling under the spreading branches of the maple.

Moments seemed hours while he waited for the bear to advance.

At last one of the boards overhead shook a little.

"Feeling your way, are you?" ejaculated Max. "I'd rather you would change your mind; but if you are determined to visit me, the sooner you come the better."

Yes, the grizzly was feeling his way.

Max could imagine him trying the planks with one of his paws, which was just what he was doing at that moment.

Suddenly with a noise that almost lifted Max Martin off his feet two of the roof boards fell in with a terrible crash, and with them came an object which looked monstrously huge!

Instinctively the boy drew back into the depths of the corner, and pressed his rifle against his shoulder.

For several moments he did not catch sight of his visitor for the broken boards had nearly covered him, but suddenly the bear shook himself clear, and looked at his surroundings.

The grizzly's astonishment was comical; his sudden descent had amazed him, and he presented an admirable target for Max's aim.

The young Californian did not hesitate, but aiming at the bear's head fired a shot which sent the animal reeling backward and to the floor in the throes of death.

Max threw another charge into the steel chamber of the repeating rifle as quickly as possible, fearful that his shot was not a fatal one; but the grizzly had already succumbed and was gasping his last.

"That's easier done than I thought," said Max

triumphantly. "A grizzly with one bullet doesn't discredit an old hunter."

He stepped to his prize and surveyed it with admiration, but his thoughts were disturbed with a suddenness that drove him back again.

"Great Cæsar! another grizzly!" he exclaimed, for on looking up he beheld the face of a second bear who was contemplating him from the edge of the gap in the roof.

Max recovered in a moment from his second surprise.

"Just stay there a moment!" he said to the new visitor, and sending his weapon swiftly against his shoulder he hurried a ball toward the apparition overhead.

An instant later a howl of rage and pain was heard, and something terribly large struck at Max's feet.

No wonder that he sprung back with an exclamation of horror.

The bear, by no means dead and as ferocious as only a wounded grizzly can be, had fallen through the opening!

Max did not realize until a second after the bear's fall that one of the paws had knocked his rifle from his hands.

"I've got this, thank fortune!" he said, drawing his revolver, and thrusting it forward. "Now, old fellow, it is to be a tussle for the mastery, I suppose."

Many a person—old hunters, even—shut up in a log cabin with a wounded grizzly, would have shrunk from the contest, but not so Max Martin.

He even advanced upon the desperate animal, eager to begin and end the conflict which could not be avoided.

He shot just as Old Eph rose on his hinder feet, aiming at the little white spot under his throat, and back from the pistol smoke staggered the bear with an angry growl.

But only for a moment.

In the twinkling of an eye he rushed forward again, meeting Max's third bullet half-way, but that did not stop his progress.

Max was forced back, and the grizzly speedily brought the fight to close quarters, so close, indeed, that the boy's revolver became useless.

He drew his knife.

Shutting his teeth hard, Max had resolved to conquer or die in the capitol of Grizzly Camp.

He saw the bear, bleeding from two wounds, rise again, and throw wide his huge fore-paw for the settling hug.

It could not be avoided, for the knife-armed boy was against the wall.

"I'll face you to the end!" he exclaimed, and at the bear he went, aiming a blow at the region of the heart as the arms closed upon him.

Max kept his right arm under the strong paw, and with all the strength he could summon struck the knife deep into the bear's side.

He thought at that moment of Fred's battle with the panther on that very spot.

Bear and boy went to the ground together.

As they struck the bloody puncheons, they fell apart and Max, as he rolled away with a gasp, relinquished his hold on the knife.

It was difficult to tell which had won.

Most probably death had claimed them both.

Twenty minutes later a heavy rap sounded on the cabin door.

"Open, Max! We've got meat enough to keep us a month," said a loud voice.

There was no response from within.

A boy's startled cry was next heard, and a face appeared at the hole in the roof.

Merciful heavens! Max has been killed by grizzlies!" and the person who alighted at Max's side was Fighting Fred Nichols.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAIL OF A DREAM.

THANKS to fortune and a good constitution, the boy lying on the cabin floor beside the bear was not dead.

"You didn't kill both these grizzlies?" asked Fred in astonishment, when Max opened his eyes in the midst of his companions.

"I think I did," was the reply, and the young victor narrated the adventure we have recorded in the foregoing chapter.

"Ned, yonder, had a very narrow escape," replied Fighting Fred. "We found Poto the dwarf strung up by the neck and buried him in his den. Then we started out on a meat-hunt. All at once Watanama discovered a pair of antlers raised above some bushes and I prepared to bag a buck. But before I could press the trigger, another rifle spoke, and the deer fell. The man who ran forward to claim his prize was Captain Snake, whom we instantly covered and made hold up his hands. Ned wanted to shoot him for helping to take Poto's life and frankly told him so. We walked up to where the captain stood and all at once he seized Ned and started off at the top of his speed. I dared not shoot, but Watanama determined that the miscreant should not escape."

"Did she shoot at Snake while he carried Ned in his arms?" questioned Max eagerly.

"Hear me through and you will know," answered Fred. "Watanama took a hasty aim and fired. I saw Ned and his captor instantly disappear, and ran forward with all my might, more than half-expecting to see the youngster lying dead among the grass along the trail. The Star of the Shoshones kept at my heels. What was my surprise and joy, Max, when I reached the spot to see Ned unharmed."

"And Captain Snake?"

"Oh, he had escaped to vex us again, if he isn't too badly wounded."

"Didn't he attempt your life?" said Max, turning to Ned.

"No; he told me before the shot was fired that he was carrying me to a person with whom I was well acquainted. I suppose he meant Old Blue. Watanama's ball must have shattered his arm for when he ran off, his left one seemed to hang useless at his side."

"It's a pity it wasn't his treacherous heart," ejaculated Fred. "I am inclined to think that we shall meet these two worthies again during our stay at Grizzly Camp, but if they come back they will meet with a reception they will never forget. For my part I wish they would come. We are in pretty good fighting trim. I've got over my panther fight, and beyond

some few bruises, Old Eph didn't hurt you, Max."

"A day will set me to rights again," smiled Max, and as his gaze wandered to the carcasses of the two grizzlies, he added, seriously:

"It was a very narrow escape and I trust I will never get into so tight a place again."

The little hunting-party had fetched home some choice venison, and several brace of mountain quail, which, added to the supply of bear-meat which Max had secured by remaining at home, more than filled the larder of the camp.

The grizzlies were skinned and the skins turned over to the Indian girl who desired to dress them in the most approved frontier style for Max.

"That red girl is uneasy about something," remarked Ned, after he had watched Watanama awhile. "She's superstitious like all her people, and on the hunt to-day I caught her talking to herself about Red Crow the red-skinned lover she killed on the tree-bridge. She doesn't think he still lives after falling two hundred feet through space and then striking the rapids of the river?"

"I would think not," said Fred; "but there's no telling what ideas these Indians get into their heads sometimes."

Nothing more was said about Watanama's uneasiness, and no one thought of it again until at the solemn hour of midnight when he was on guard at the door of the cabin, Fred felt a hand laid on his arm.

Turning quickly he beheld the form of the Indian girl at his side.

"Don't speak, white boy," she said, in the lowest of whispers. "Watanama is going to say good-by."

"What's that?—going away, eh?" ejaculated Fred, unable to conceal his astonishment.

"The Star of the Shoshones must go," was the determined rejoinder. "She slept and had a dream. In that dream the spirit of Red Crow whispered at her ear."

Fred was about to say "nonsense," but checked himself for the faint light in the cabin showed him the red girl's serious countenance.

"You believe in such things, but I don't," he said, instead. "But Red Crow was your foe as well as your lover. Why, then, should his spirit come back to you?"

"The Great Spirit send Red Crow back."

"What did he say to you?"

"He told Watanama to meet him at the tree."

"The bridge?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now, white boy."

Fred made no reply, but felt the hand of the red girl tighten on his arm.

"Open door for Watanama," she said. "She must listen to the voice of the dead; she shall go to Red Crow."

"What if I should refuse?"

The girl stepped back and pointed toward the roof of the cabin:

"Watanama will go out the way the bears came in," she said. "She is going to the tree."

"Then you shall go by the door."

Fred said no more, but proceeded to remove

the barricades as noiselessly as possible. He did not want to disturb his sleeping comrades.

He succeeded in his design, and pressing Watanama's hand in mute good-by, he saw her slip away and closed the door after her.

"I'm going to see the outcome of this dream," he said to himself, as he began to put the barricades back in their places. "It is only a short distance to the river; and the girl may need help. She shall not want for assistance while I can render any."

He stooped over Ned and awoke him with a touch.

"Take my place. I'll be back soon," he said.

"You are not going out, I hope?" asked the astonished Ned.

"I am—to the river."

"At this hour?"

"Ask no questions. Keep your eyes open."

Fighting Fred sprung to one side of the cabin, and by means of the logs, ascended nimbly to the roof, where he moved one of the planks aside and began to climb out.

Ned watched him with eyes full of surprise, but did not speak until he had entirely disappeared.

"That's a queer caper, but let him go," he muttered. "He'll repent of his folly before morning."

Fred alighted on the ground outside in safety, and hurried forward to find Watanama, but not a glimpse of the Shoshone girl could he obtain.

He resolved, however, to make his way as rapidly as possible to the tree that bridged the rapid river, and away he went at good speed.

"What do I see?" he exclaimed, pausing suddenly in the moonlight a short time afterward, and staring at an object ahead. "Somebody has deprived the tree-bridge of almost all its foliage. There is somebody about to step upon it. Can it be Watanama?"

Fred advanced nearer, eager to establish the identity of the form he had espied.

All at once he stopped and crouched behind some bushes.

He was scarcely more than fifty feet from the tree, and standing upon it outlined against the rounded disk of the moon he saw a figure which he was sure he recognized?

"Watanama is here, Red Crow," said the voice of the Shoshone girl. "She heard you speak to her while she slept, and her feet hastened to reach the appointed spot. Now, tell her what she must do. She listens for the commands of the brave whose life she took because he persecuted her."

The only response was the roar of the river that thundered over its rocky bed two hundred feet below.

"There's something crossing on the tree," suddenly cried Fred, whose eyes had wandered from the girl for a moment. "Is it a panther or is it an Indian? Watanama does not see it."

No, the Indian girl did not see the object creeping surely upon her from the other bank of the stream.

Fighting Fred kept his eyes upon it.

He could see the body move in and out among the scanty foliage left on the fallen trunk, and noted that the distance between the creeper and Watanama was rapidly lessening.

"I see now—it is an Indian!" he said. "Watanama's dream is to end with a tragedy if I do not interfere. Thank Heaven! I am here to protect the girl!"

At that moment the Star of the Shoshones advanced toward the middle of the river with her right hand upraised.

"Let the Great Spirit speak if Red Crow will not," she cried. "Watanama is here and her ears are open!"

Fred fancied he could see the eyes of the red crawler flash fire while they regarded the girl.

"Now is my time!" he exclaimed.

A bound carried him forward.

"Stop! stop!" he cried to the red girl.

Alarmed at his voice Watanama instantly turned.

The red crawler sprung up at the same moment.

"You shall not touch her. I am here!" flashed Fred, as he threw himself between the warrior and his almost victim with his face turned toward the former. "Back! you accursed red-skin!"

The Indian answered with a cry of rage and dashed at Fred with uplifted tomahawk.

"Not yet!" grated the boy, thrusting a revolver forward, and touching the trigger at the right moment.

There was a wild cry that mingled weirdly with the roar of the river, and a half-naked figure pitched downward through the moonlight to lose itself among the waters below.

The next instant the air seemed full of arrows!

A sharp pain darted through Fred's arm; his weapon fell from his grasp!

"I've got another for you, my red-skins!" he said, but before he could draw it he felt a strange dizziness come over him.

Vainly did he try to keep his balance on the log, to turn and rush toward the shore.

A wild cry pealed from his lips when he felt his feet slipping from under him.

Where was Watanama?

In another instant Fred's feet had left the log and he was actually falling!

The horror of his situation almost froze his blood.

His hands closed on the first thing they brushed, and he held on with a death-grip.

Well did he know that he was hanging over the foaming torrent two hundred feet below, yet he dared not look downward.

A second seemed an hour.

Suddenly the air was cut by twenty wild whoops; the log above him shook.

Fred understood it. The Indians were crossing the bridge!

CHAPTER XVII.

SAVED!—FRED GRANTS TWO DOGS LIFE.

"BETTER the river than death by their tomahawks," crossed the boy's mind like a flash.

He was helpless, and, what added to his peril, was the fact that the branch to which he clung threatened to break with his weight.

A glance along the log above showed him a number of figures advancing upon him.

"I'll perish fighting!" he exclaimed.

He loosened one hand, but held on with two-fold courage with the other.

Then he made out to draw and cock his revolver.

"My situation does not render me harmless," he continued. "I will show you red-skins what a California boy can do when he's cornered."

Raising the revolver, Fighting Fred fired a hasty shot at the foremost savage, now not more than ten feet away.

The brave fell back and dropped upon the log badly wounded, and checking his companion's advance.

"White boy hold up hand—quick!" said a voice at this juncture, directly above him, and Fred saw Watanama, the Shoshone girl, leaning toward him, with one hand thrust downward.

He instantly thrust the revolver back into his belt and held up his hand, which the Indian girl seized and began to exert her strength to draw him up.

Fred assisted Watanama as much as he could, and hailed with joy the moment when he was able to draw himself upon the log once more.

Not a moment was to be lost.

The last red-skin shot by the boy had fallen into the river below, and the others were about to resume the offensive again.

Fred and Watanama started toward the bank, seeing which the Shoshones on the log sprung forward.

"We'll finish some of the work here!" cried the boy, wheeling resolutely upon the enemy as he reached the bank.

The next moment he opened fire on the Indians hurrying forward.

Struck by the deadly missiles, the Shoshones recoiled, and those that did not beat a retreat tried to hide themselves amid the scanty foliage of the tree.

Fred did not pause until he had emptied the chambers of his revolver into the writhing mass.

Then he turned to the Indian girl.

"I guess you don't admire the sequel of your dream," he said. "Come, let us get back to the cabin. Ah! here are the boys. They arrive on the field after the battle has been fought."

Fred's last remarks had been called forth by the arrival of Ned and Max, who had come up out of breath, but with ready weapons in their hands and eager to take part against the Indians.

"We heard a revolver-shot, and started," explained Max. "You must have had a narrow escape, Fred."

"I have, indeed. The very thought of it makes me shudder. Those red fiends have had all the powder and lead they want to-night. With our arms, we are too strong for them to follow us up."

The boys of Grizzly Camp were not molested when they retired toward the cabin.

As Fred had said, the Indians had been punished enough, for they did not send even so much as an arrow after the little party.

Watanama went back to camp without speaking a word, but when the hut had been reached again Fred addressed her.

"Who was the first brave I encountered on

the log—the one that crept upon you while you were talking to the Great Spirit?" he asked.

"It was Bald Eagle, Red Crow's brother."

"He would have killed you?"

"He wanted Watanama's blood because her hatchet slew Red Crow."

"How did he discover that?"

"Red Crow's spirit whispered at his ear as it did at Watanama's," was the answer.

The Star of the Shoshones relapsed into silence again and Fred withdrew.

The camp was left undisturbed, but by no means unguarded, the remainder of the night.

The boys expected to receive an attack from the Shoshones, but none came.

They did not know that the Indians had held a council of war, at which it had been decided to withdraw from the dangerous locality, and the tenants of Grizzly Camp were left in possession of the field.

A bold reconnaissance by Fred on the following morning showed that the Shoshones had left, and Watanama assured the boys that they would not return.

Old Blue and Captain Snake were still to be feared, and the camp was again put in readiness to receive them should they attempt any of their depredations.

Several days passed away without bringing on an attack, and the boys of Grizzly Camp began to hunt again.

Some rare sport was thus obtained, but they were always on the look-out for human enemies.

At nightfall the cabin door would be closed and secured against invaders of every kind, and around the little fire kindled on the ground in the middle of the apartment the boys would listen to the wild Indian legends that fell from Watanama's lips.

In the mean time the mine beneath the cabin had been fully explored, and the young trappers were satisfied that they had found the famous one lost for so many years.

They resolved to proceed to the nearest Government fort within a short time and report their discovery.

Watanama offered to guide the party, and everything was ready for the departure, when an incident occurred that to some extent disarranged their plans.

The Star of the Shoshones was in the middle of a legend one night when a heavy blow fell upon the cabin door.

In an instant the occupants of Grizzly Camp were on their feet and held their weapons in their hands.

Fred strode to the door.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Red friends, white hunters," was the reply.

"I doubt that. I think we haven't any red friends in these parts. Tell me your name."

"Sweeping Tempest."

"That's definite, but not very satisfactory," replied Fred with a light smile.

By this time Watanama had reached the boy's side.

"Open the door to Sweeping Tempest," she said.

"Who is he?"

"The great chief of the Warm Spring Indians."

They are at peace with the Great Father at Washington."

"I know that, and I will open to Sweeping Tempest."

Fred was not long in removing the barricades and opening the door.

The next moment there stepped into the cabin a tall, well-formed Indian, who looked every inch a chief.

"Sweeping Tempest and his braves have caught two pale-faced wolves in the mountains," said the red-skin. "They hate the young pale-faces for they have said so, and Sweeping Tempest has brought the prisoners to them for punishment."

"Where are the captives?" asked Fred.

"Let the white boys follow Sweeping Tempest."

The boys of Grizzly Camp did not hesitate, but followed the chief from the cabin into the bright moonlight without.

"Here are the mountain wolves," said the Indian, waving his hand toward two men who wore the garments of rough borderers.

The boys went forward.

"Old Blue and Captain Snake!" exclaimed Ned after a moment's inspection.

The men whose names had been pronounced did not speak, but glared sullenly at the three boy trappers.

Old Blue and Captain Snake had come back to the camp, but in a manner least expected by the boys and themselves.

"What will the young whites do with these wolves?" suddenly asked Sweeping Tempest.

"They are captives now and helpless," answered Fred. "We cannot punish them, however richly they deserve punishment."

The Indians looked astonished.

"The snake that the hunter spares to-day may bite him to-morrow," said the chief, addressing the boys.

"I know that," was Fred's reply. "We do not fear those men. Will you leave the country if we let you go?" he asked, addressing Captain Snake.

"You kin try us if you want ter."

"That is no reply at all. Will you go away and trouble us no more, if you gain your liberty?"

"Yes, we'll go," said Old Blue. "I'll answer for the cap'n. He's mad, an' won't give you any satisfaction."

"Let them go," said Fred, turning to the chief.

Sweeping Tempest hesitated a moment, and then gave orders for the prisoners' release.

Sullenly, and without thanking any one for the change of fortune, the two desperadoes walked away.

Three minutes later from toward the river came the report of a firearm, and Sweeping Tempest fell forward on his face!

A cry for vengeance rose from the throats of the Warm Spring braves, and the next second the whole band sprung toward the stream.

"We spared two fiends!" exclaimed Fred. "Let us help to pay them back for this deed!" And away he went, with Ned and Max at his heels.

It was a race for life.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TERRIBLE LEAP—FORTUNE AND FAME.

AFTER firing the dastardly shot, Old Blue and his companion started off in the direction of the tree-bridge, followed, as we have just seen, by the eager Indians.

The pursuers knew that they would attempt to cross the river on the tree, and strained every nerve to overtake them before they could reach it.

The two men ran at the top of their speed, Old Blue leading the advance.

All at once he stopped and pointed toward the river.

"Look! by my soul, the old tree is gone!" he exclaimed.

"It was there yesterday," said Captain Snake, staring at the spot where the tree had rested on the bank.

"That doesn't help us now," was the reply. There's a river between us and safety, and yonder come our foes. Curse the luck, cap'n! If I had a revolver I wouldn't care; but I haven't a single weapon that will do me any good."

At that moment the foremost of their pursuers burst into view.

Old Blue sprung toward the river, and halted on the very brink of the precipice.

"Have you the nerve to jump, cap'n?" he asked his companion.

Captain Snake looked madly at his enemies for a moment and then glanced downward at the roaring torrent.

It was certain death to jump, and death to recoil.

"Jump it is, Blue!" he said. "This adventure has turned out poorly. Oh, you skunks! we're goin' to cheat you yet!" he had turned to the Indians again. "We will never give you a hair of our heads. Hurrah for Old Blue and Cap'n Snake!"

The boy trappers seemed to know what was coming.

They saw the two desperadoes turn to the river again.

Fred rushed in advance of the whole party.

"Halt!" he cried.

"Not any more!" was the response and in the moonlight two figures sprung over the bank!

The Indians uttered yells of rage and disappointment.

The next instant the entire party reached the spot, but the two men had disappeared.

"That is the end of them," said Fred, gazing down into the turbid waters. "What a thrilling place this has been since our occupation of Grizzly Camp. We might as well go back now; the trail has ended!"

The Indians were reluctant to return without the scalps of the two worthies, but these trophies were not to be had, for the waters had already carried them far away.

Examination showed that a part of the bank had given way and let the tree-bridge into the river; hence the doom of the mountain wolves.

When the disappointed party returned to camp, Watanama, who had remained behind, announced an agreeable surprise.

Sweeping Tempest was neither dead nor mortally wounded, the ball passing along his temple having stunned him, nothing more.

The Warm Spring Indians sent up shouts of rejoicing at this intelligence, and the camp rung with sounds of merry-making.

Although buried in the wilds of Oregon, the boys of Grizzly Camp now feared no foe, for they could rely on Sweeping Tempest and his braves for protection and friendship.

They did not see fit to impart to their red allies the secret of the cave of gold, but kept that to themselves.

A month later, after a delightful abode in unmolested Grizzly Camp, they were visited by a number of Government scouts from the nearest military station and promised protection in their mining operations.

It was Fred's work, for, in company with Watanama and three of the Warm Spring savages, he had made the journey to the Government post and returned in safety.

All thoughts of proceeding to Fort Okinakane were now abandoned, and the mine was revealed to all.

Contrary to the boys' expectations, it did not turn out to be the famous Lost Mine; but the gold it produced has enriched the three who were abandoned in Grizzly Camp by Old Blue and his companions.

Ned has since met the youth who gave him advice that saved his life when Half Moon had lashed him to the wild horse after his capture; but the old chief he never met.

He turned out to be a white boy who had been captured by the Indians when very young.

We need not say that he was welcomed at Grizzly Camp, and assured of Ned's undying friendship.

Watanama remained at the camp until she saw it peopled with whites, when she bade the three boys farewell, and went off with a young Warm Spring Indian whose wife she has doubtless since become.

Fred keeps his panther-skin, and Max would not take the world in exchange for his grizzly pelts.

As for Ned, he has trophies, too, among them a long lock of black hair, which he seldom shows but which he admires much in secret.

Fighting Fred says that when Watanama went away she carried with her the heart of Ned Knight, and that the black tress will make a bachelor of him.

I am inclined to believe that Fred is right, but the future will tell the tale.

Back once more in San Francisco, where they are known as "The Young Gold-bugs," Ned, Max and Fred are enjoying life, and often narrate to attentive listeners their many adventures in and about old Grizzly Camp, which today is a mining-town of no little importance.

Here we take leave of three Castaways of the Oregon mountains, and wish them continued success in life.

THE END.

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